

Perla Serfaty-Garzon©

**MEANING AND FRUITFULNESS IN LATE LIFE:
LONGEVITY IN JEWISH TRADITION**

2014 J.I. Segal Award for the French Version.

Original Title: **Vieillesse et engendremments. La longévité dans la tradition juive.**

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Translation from French to English: **William Lipnick**, Ph. D. in French Literature (Yale), Graduate, Baltimore Hebrew College

Translator's notes and English translation of the footnotes can be found at the end of the book.

I dedicate this book to Naomi Rose (Lexington, Kentucky) whose friendship enriches my life and continues to inspire my vision of my own ageing

FOREWORD

It cannot be said often enough. Before sounding the alarm in contemporary Western societies regarding the difficulty of funding retirement and caring for those who have lost their autonomy, let us remember that longevity was, in keeping with the Biblical vision of long

life as a blessing, one of the great hopes of mankind, an age-old promise of science and one of the aspirations of progress. As is demonstrated by demographers, this prolonged lifespan is inexorable. It marks the aging of populations in Western societies, and, despite the present crisis of the notion of progress, the success of this aspiration.

These demographic and social mutations manifest themselves with the surprise appearance in the bargain of a new breed of senior citizens who are living longer active lives in good health. And when health fails, in keeping with the logic of an individualistic society that places great value on personal autonomy, today's elderly often strive to preserve this autonomy as long as possible, sometimes with very mixed results. At the same time, they demonstrate, in new terms, the desire to transform old age into one of the high points of life.

But, what are – what could be – the substance, the various forms of such a “high point”? The contemporary “schools” of aging well and socially useful old age are numerous and depend to a large extent on the manner in which it is viewed in public policy, institutions, families, social sciences or medical sciences. All these various approaches divide the investigation of the psychological stakes that are specific to aging from the stakes of each individual expression of old age. They do so, moreover, within the perceived threat of collective responsibility toward those who have lost their autonomy. Furthermore, to quite an unequal degree, these approaches address the personal and collective stakes regarding the philosophy of community harmony, of a

philosophy and ethics of age. In this context of rethinking of so many commonly accepted notions regarding old age, its process, its stages, its experience, its personal and collective meaning, Western societies struggle to formulate a vision of the process of growing old capable of defining the possible roles of seniors within the group, and to propose modern terms for the social and moral callings of longevity.

However, at present, collective ethical and philosophical questionings regarding the collective meaning or meanings that are to be assigned to long life and to advanced old age in Western societies are not lacking. Like the scholarly and popular attempts to mark out the path of 'good aging,' they continue to be based on two pillars. Biblical and Judo-Christian teachings on the one hand, and ancient, and later Classical, philosophy on the other, have indeed, nourished them and continue to influence our ways of looking at old age. This is particularly true in regard to the fundamental questions about the (best) way of conducting one's individual life at that stage of life. And if philosophical approaches differ and if Jewish, Christian, Greek and Roman sources are continually reinterpreted through the centuries, the process of aging and old age still need to be qualified, within – and outside of – these theological and philosophical frameworks. Confronted today, just as was the case in the past, with existential questions of personal aging and old age, and collective questionings, they need to be situated in a meaningful normative framework and into a social universe, both individual and subjective. These teachings concerning aging and old age deserve then to be revisited. This is what we

propose to do on the basis of the major source that is the Hebrew Bible.

It is hardly necessary to remind readers of the centrality of the Hebrew Bible for the Jewish people and contemporary Jewish communities. Nor it is necessary to remind them of the importance, the very ancient and enduring influence of these sources for many men and women who place themselves outside of the identity and history of the Hebrews, the people of Israel or the Jewish people. These men and women, who consider themselves and assert themselves to be also removed from to the theological framework mapped out in the Hebrew Bible, nevertheless remain connected to this day by the Biblical narratives, their moral significance and the ethical horizons they open up.

Biblical literature is one of Revelation. This being the case, it expresses itself in teleological terms, which are those of a Messianic mindset. But its influence has endured above all as regards moral values and moral vision of life and human relations, even while the Biblical theological framework no longer constitutes in our days a common reference in Western societies. For them, these values form an integral part of the moral landscape of these societies. There are many who base their actions on these values, without being able – or seeking to – identify the Biblical foundations of them. In regard to aging, old age, and advanced old age, a number of these foundations can be identified.

For example, let us consider life as a value in and of itself, regardless

of the age and physical condition of the subject. This value has marked Western civilization for thousands of years. Although it is not directly connected – at least explicitly – to the Biblical theological narrative, this value still remains at the core of contemporary ethical debates related to advanced old age, taking care of those who have lost their autonomy, the decision to continue or halt medical care in situations of extreme suffering, medical assistance in dying and euthanasia.

Let us consider the obligation – still altogether alive – of transmission from one generation to the next the echoes of which span the Biblical vision of uninterrupted chain of generations from one end to the other.

Finally, let us consider – one example out of so many others – the modern social injunction for continuing learning during old age. Among other aspects, this injunction is an extension of the Biblical vision of a continuing role in social, family and collective life until advanced old age.

One will not find a systematic treatment of aging or of old age as a process or experience in the Hebrew Bible. But one does encounter a number of old men and women whose diverse roles illustrate the range of individual experiences of aging, as well as the psychological issues that are specific to the process of growing old.

Kohelet (Ecclesiastes), one Biblical example among so many others, is an old man. His text explores all the facets of these issues. He has left his mark on the ages well beyond the scope of Jewish tradition and

Western cultures continue to cite his aphorisms, present in all Biblical canons. But if it continues to be one of the most commented texts in all of Biblical literature, both within and outside of the circles of Biblical scholarship, it is because it goes beyond an individual response to the approach of death to broach the philosophical, ethical and theological stakes of aging.

This is what one will find abundantly in the Biblical narratives of the histories or chapters of life of the old: in the course of stories opened up by commentaries and interpretations, a moral code of old age which provides a philosophical basis for the manner to relate to age and a vision of collective life for a practical moral code intended to define individual behaviour toward the elderly; collective commandments and obligations toward the elderly, and above all, a vision of the ethical and social calling of age in the chain of generations.

A moral code of old age, which is a moral code of spiritual transmission, fruitfulness and regeneration, constitutes the enduring and fundamental contribution of Biblical literature. In the Messianic perspective that characterizes it, to the centrality of its concern for the relationship of man to the divine plan, this is the case. But, also, as witness the vitality of current debates around all the themes which bear on aging and old age, because of the paramount Biblical concern for the subject and his inner and moral development, and in an equally essential manner, on account of its fundamental preoccupation for the human condition.

What then is this moral code which is still at the core of contemporary ethical and collective debates? It is the intention of the present work to identify its dimensions and explore its social, practical, philosophical and ethical facets, before offering a unified vision for it.

CHAPTER 1

INTO ADVANCED AGE, BIBLICAL FIGURES REMAIN FRUITFUL, EXTRAORDINARY, AND FAILLIBLE SUBJECTS

This is the book of the lineage (toldot)¹ of Adam [...] And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and he begot in his likeness by his image and called his name Seth... And all the days Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years. Then he died... And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years. Then he died... And Enosh [son of Seth] lived after he begot Kenan eight hundred and fifteen years, and he begot sons and daughters... And all the days of Methusaleh were nine hundred and sixty-nine years. Then he died. (Genesis 5: 1, 3, 5, 8, 27).²

¹ Ou, selon RACHI : « Ceci est le livre des générations d'Adam. C'est l'énumération (*sefira*) des générations qui ont succédé à Adam. »

Rabbi Shlomo BEN ITZHAK HATZARFATI dit RACHI (Troyes, 1040-1105), est exégète, légiste et décisionnaire. Il est aussi poète et vigneron. Il reste l'une des principales autorités du judaïsme. Son commentaire, écrit au Moyen Âge, sur la quasi-totalité de la Bible hébraïque et du Talmud de Babylone est considéré jusqu'à nos jours comme indispensable à l'étude de ces derniers.

Pour un exposé des différentes acceptions du terme *toldot* (תולדות) dans la Genèse, voir Tamar SCHWARTZ (2008), *Berechit : Des mots pour créer*. <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5769/-dans-les-mots-5769/berechit-des-mots-pour-creer-15-10-2008-7442_4312.php>

Pour saisir les différences signifiantes des quatre orthographes de ce terme dans la Bible, voir également <http://www.akadem.org/medias/documents/1_toldot-cit.pdf>

Pour une analyse de la notion de *toldot* en ce qu'elle qualifie à la fois le devenir cosmogonique et la généalogie humaine, voir Charles MOPSIK (2003), *Le sexe des âmes. Aléas de la différence sexuelle dans la cabale*. <<http://www.lyber-eclat.net/lyber/mopsik1/intro.html>> Page consultée le 17 février 2013.

² In this work, we have used Robert Alter's masterful translations of Biblical texts: for the Pentateuch, *The Five Books of Moses*, New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2004; *Ancient Israel, The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings*, New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2013; *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes*, New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2010.

Men whose lifespan appears to us as the stuff of legend, men who became fathers at ages which are just as extraordinary, only to die centuries later. The rhythm of enumeration of “begettings” continues to the generation of the children of Noah³ who fathered Shem⁴ at the age of 500. Extreme old age and fecundity at an advanced age are among the remarkable characteristics of the men who came after Adam. This is a constant which would be modified with the Patriarchs. Still, their lifespan remains very long from our point of view. The Hebrew Bible portrays the personal journey of personages who are both exceptional individuals and subjects. Each old man has his own individual history. For each one, his personality and his contribution to the foundation and development of the history of the group. The history of the Hebrew people passes through the history of the individual, thus establishing a close connection between their individual stories and the collective destiny.

The greatness of these exceptional individuals is all the more impressive in that they remain human, and therefore, fallible. Exceptional and liable to err, like Moses who is nonetheless considered as the greatest of the prophets of Israel, the greatest political leader and liberator. The accounts of their greatness, which always remains their own, as well as the narrative of their personal flaws and of the consequences of their

³ La Genèse consacre les 32 versets de son chapitre 5 à l'énonciation des engendremens de l'humanité, d'Adam à Noé, père de Sem, puis Cham et Japhet, soulignant la centralité de l'idée d'engendrement dans l'identité des Hébreux et, plus tard, d'Israël, puis du peuple juif.

⁴ Le terme « sémite » a été forgé à partir du nom de Sem, ce dernier étant l'ancêtre direct du fondateur du peuple juif, Abraham.

mistakes, the expression of their joys and fears bear witness to their humanity. This, it must be emphasized, is equally true for the younger Biblical figures.

Regarding flaws and mistakes, there is Noah, the one who brings hope and consolation and who was born to relieve the earth of its curse⁵. For Noah was born at a time when the earth was barren and the world was wicked, steeped in confusion and debauchery⁶. Inventor, according to Biblical tradition, of the plow, Noah lifts the curse that has weighed down on the earth which now more readily yields its fruits. He also remains righteous⁷ amid a generation so depraved that God himself regrets having created all living things⁸ and has determined to destroy them. It is through the mission that Gods entrusts to Noah the upright that mankind will be able to go on after the Flood; it is through him that the

⁵ De l'hébreu נַחְנֹחַ, Noé signifie repos ou consolation. Il est, selon la tradition, l'enfant qui porte l'espoir de Dieu. « Lamec, [fils de Mathusalem] ayant vécu cent quatre-vingt-deux ans, engendra un fils. Il énonça son nom Noé, en disant : "Puisse-t-il nous soulager de notre tâche et du labeur de nos mains, causé par cette terre qu'a maudite l'Éternel!" » (*Pentateuque, Genèse, 5, 28-29*).

Commentaire de RACHI de *Genèse 5, 29* : « Celui-ci nous consolera » Le mot *yena'haménou* (« il nous consolera ») est à décomposer en : *yena'h* et *miménou* (« il fera cesser nos peines »). Jusqu'à Noa'h, l'homme ne possédait pas d'instruments de labour. C'est lui qui les a fabriqués. La terre, lorsqu'on semait du blé, produisait ronces et épines à cause de la malédiction prononcée contre Adam (Midrach tan'houma). L'époque de Noa'h a marqué la fin de ces calamités. »

⁶ « Or, quand les hommes eurent commencé à se multiplier sur la terre, et que des filles leur naquirent, les fils de la race divine trouvèrent que les filles de l'homme étaient belles, et ils choisirent pour femmes toutes celles qui leur convinrent » (*Pentateuque, Genèse, 6, 2*).

⁷ « Mais Noé trouva grâce aux yeux de l'Éternel. Ceci est l'histoire de Noé. Noé fut un homme juste, irréprochable, entre ses contemporains; il se conduisit selon Dieu » (*Pentateuque, Genèse, 6, 9*).

⁸ « Et l'Éternel dit : "J'effacerai l'homme que j'ai créé de dessus la face de la terre; depuis l'homme jusqu'à la brute, jusqu'à l'insecte, jusqu'à l'oiseau du ciel, car je regrette de les avoir faits. » (*Pentateuque, Genèse, 6, 7*).

world will be saved. But coming out of the Ark:

And Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and exposed himself within his tent. And Ham the father of Canaan saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. And Shem and Japheth took a cloak and put it over their shoulders and walked backward so that they did not see their father's nakedness. And Noah woke from his wine and he knew not what his youngest son had done to him. And he said, 'Cursed be Canaan, the lowliest slave shall he be to his brothers.' (Genesis 9:20-25).

Back on *terra firma*, Noah craving wine planted a vineyard, rather than any other agricultural enterprise that would have been more immediately useful at the dawn of a new era and a new life. Drunkenness – that other breach of decent behavior – brought on a violent episode⁹ that led this savior of mankind to curse his own progeny. This curse punished Ham, his own son, who had rejected his father's generation. By preventing his father from procreating, he introduces a breach in the continuity of generations. This choice was all the more far-reaching since the people of Israel grounds the continuity of its existence and identity on the uninterrupted succession of generations. The fact remains, however, that tradition sees in Noah the righteous man, the one who is utterly righteous, whose righteousness is so rigorous that it is diverted from its necessary complement, which is loving-kindness¹⁰. The greatness of his

⁹ « RACHI considère que Ham [Cham] n'aurait pas seulement vu la nudité de son père, mais l'aurait castré » pour l'empêcher d'avoir un quatrième enfant. Voir : <http://www.akadem.org/medias/documents/quatrieme-fils-Doc3.pdf>

¹⁰ Transmise en hébreu par la notion de *hessed*.

destiny in the history of the people is much diminished on this account.

Among other examples of errors that contribute to the complexity and subtle traits that differentiate the portraits of the great elders of the Bible, the most notable is Moses' offense, one that was deemed to be irremediable even as the name of Moses is forever linked to Torah¹¹. Of him the daily prayers say:

And no prophet again arose in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10).

As the Children of Israel reach the Wilderness of Sin:

And the community had no water, and they assembled against Moses and against Aaron (Numbers 20:2).

“Take the staff and assemble the community, you and Aaron your brother, and you shall speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water, and I shall bring forth water for them from the rock and give drink to the community and to its beasts”. And Moses took the staff from before the Lord as He had charged. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly in front of the rock, and said to them, “Listen, pray, rebels! Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?” And Moses raised his hand, and he struck the rock with his staff twice and abundant water came out (Numbers 8-11).

In place of words spoken with Aaron, whose speech is fluent and who is profoundly capable of empathy, the anger and doubly violent gesture of Moses, who is called “the meek one” and “the man of few words,” and yet embodies truth and divine commandments. According to the commentator, the offense lies in not having given the word the

¹¹ Révélée par Moïse sur le Mont Sinaï, la Thora est désignée de plusieurs façons, dont *Le livre de la Thora de Moïse (Sefer Thorat Moché)*, *Le livre de la Thora de Dieu dans la main de Moïse (Sefer Thorat Hachem beyad Moché)* et *Le livre de Moïse (Sefer Moché)*.

opportunity to be transmitted with kindness in order to promote peace¹². On account of this offense, Moses, and Aaron too, will not be allowed to lead the people to the Promised Land, that is he will not be allowed to see his unique mission through to its completion¹³.

The old men and women of the Bible make up so many highly differentiated characters, at the same time great and flawed. Into advanced old age, their story, which always remains distinct, expresses – in spite of their moral failings and mistakes – their ethical striving. Thus, there takes shape an experience of aging which is always specific to each one and a vision of old age always moving forward and aspiring to its ethical fulfillment. In the Bible, old age should always be fruitful.

¹² Commentaire de RACHI de *Exode* 20, 12 : « Pour me sanctifier » Car si vous aviez parlé au rocher et qu'il eût fait jaillir de l'eau, j'aurais été sanctifié aux yeux de la communauté qui se serait dit : « Si ce rocher, qui ne parle ni n'entend ni n'a besoin de nourriture, exécute l'ordre de Hachem, à plus forte raison nous incombe-t-il de le faire! » En d'autres termes, Moïse n'a pas reconnu dans le peuple hébreu un peuple déjà uni dans un projet commun que le témoignage du miracle opéré par la parole aurait renforcé dans son sentiment d'obligation d'obéissance aux commandements.

Pour certains commentateurs, Moïse n'était pas, dans le projet divin, destiné à entrer en Terre promise, car il était essentiellement l'homme de la traversée et non celui de l'installation et de la sédentarité. Voir, pour une analyse des dimensions, des enjeux et des différents commentaires de la faute de Moïse, Michel REVEL (2010), *Houkat : comprendre la faute de Moïse*.
<http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5770/parachat-hachavoua-5770/houkat-comprendre-la-faute-de-moise-03-06-2010-8169_4309.php> Page consultée le 25 octobre 2012.

¹³ « Parce que vous avez été fautifs envers moi au milieu des enfants d'Israël, à l'occasion des eaux de Meriba à Kadêch, dans le désert de Cîn, en ne me sanctifiant pas au milieu des enfants d'Israël, ce n'est qu'à distance que tu verras le pays : mais tu n'y entreras point, dans ce pays que je donne aux enfants d'Israël » (*Pentateuque, Deutéronome*, 32, 51-52).

CHAPTER 2

FROM WITHIN THE INNER SELF: TO DIALOGUE WITH GOD AND CALL HIM TO ACCOUNT

Beginning with the example of the three patriarchs, the daily prayers emphasize the importance of the individuality of each of the elders of the Bible: “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,” (Exodus 3: 6), as the liturgical phrase puts it¹⁴. The same One God, and yet called upon three times, in a repetition that emphasizes the personal mode of the relationship with God of each one of the Patriarchs. Uttered every day, this phrase of the liturgy invites each person to find his own way to relate to God.

Speaking to God without a mediator – the Hebrew Bible is strewn with personal dialogues with God, with expressions of rebellion and with pleas and demands that stem from the inner self, justification of God’s deeds or attempts to resist them. As this from Job: *Yet I search for El / and to God I make my case* (Job 5:8).

Personality, inner life, concrete experience: dialogue and questioning are by no means in the abstract. On the contrary, they come out of the

¹⁴ « Il ajouta : "Je suis la Divinité de ton père, le Dieu d'Abraham, d'Isaac et [le Dieu] de Jacob..." Moïse se couvrit le visage, craignant de regarder le Seigneur » (*Pentateuque, Exode 3, 6*).

self, from a personality and a unique way of defining oneself in life. Job speaks to God from out of his grief, his loss and his affliction. It is with a greater degree of boldness that Abraham calls God to task from out of his goodness, his benevolence toward others and his capacity for doing good.

The “founding father” of the Jewish people calls upon God, and forcefully questions Him --an act that God does not hold against him – on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose inhabitants are debauched in the extreme. Abraham pleads their case, point by point, in the name of the Divine quality of justice, to be sure, but also in the name of the existence of collective merit, notwithstanding its being limited to but ten persons within the group¹⁵.

And Abraham stepped forward and said, “Will you really wipe out the innocent with the guilty? Perhaps there may be fifty innocents within the city. Will You really wipe out the place and not spare it for the sake of the fifty innocents within it? Far be from You to do such a thing, to put to death the innocent within it, making innocent and guilty the same. Far be it from You! Will not the Judge of all the earth do justice?” And the Lord said, “Should I find in Sodom fifty innocent within the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.” And Abraham spoke up and said, “Here, pray, I have presumed to speak to my Lord when I am but dust and ashes. Perhaps the fifty innocents will lack five. Would You destroy the whole city for the five?” And He said, “I will not destroy it if I find there forty-five.” And he spoke to Him still again and he said, “Perhaps there will be found forty.” And He said, “I

¹⁵ Pour une étude de l’interpellation de Dieu par Abraham, voir Yossef ATTOUN, *Haazinou : la force du collectif*.

<http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5767/parachat-hachavoua-5767/haazinou-la-force-du-collectif-26-08-2007-7027_4314.php> Page consultée le 25 octobre 2012.

will not do it on account of the forty.” And he said, “Please, my let not my Lord be incensed and let me speak, perhaps there will be found thirty.” And He said, “I will not do it if I find there thirty.” And he said, “Here, pray, I have presumed to speak to my Lord. Perhaps there will be found twenty.” And He said, “I will not destroy for the sake of the twenty.” And he said, “Please, let not my Lord be incensed and let me speak just this time. Perhaps there will be found ten.” And He said, “I will not destroy for the sake of the ten.” (Genesis 18:23-32).

The vulnerabilities of the self and of private identity are equally at home in the dialogue with God. So it is with Moses, who, according to Rashi, was a stammerer¹⁶. It is this special trait, one that he deems a flaw that should disqualify him from his mission of transmitting the Divine Message – founded of necessity on the authority of speech -- that Moses invokes as his final argument when he questions the Divine injunction and ventures a final line of resistance.

And Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and I that I should bring out the Israelites from Egypt?”

And Moses said, “Please, my Lord, no man of words am I, not at any time in the past nor now You have spoken to your servant, for I am heavy-mouthed and heavy-tongued.” (Exodus 3:11, 4:10).

The great elders of the Bible are not then saints, even when their stature causes them to be numbered among the most respected figures of tradition. Their individuality stems from their place in the narrative of the people to which they belong, their accomplishments and adherence to the divine plan, as well as their shortcomings and

¹⁶ Commentaire de RACHI de *Exode* 4, 10 : « Lourd de bouche je parle avec lourdeur. En italien médiéval : *balbo* (bègue). » <http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque/Exode_4_10.aspx>.

deviations from this same plan. They speak to God and question Him from their existential position as subjects. Indeed,

The Bible is not a holy book in the sense of a collection of hagiographic tales: it portrays human passions (murder, rape, incest, treachery, cowardice, massacre, pillaging) in the midst of which the rule of “might makes right” must still give way to the rule of morality, usually inspired or sacralized by divine commandments. Its age-old distinctiveness resides in the permanent struggle of mankind with the uncertain, since far-from-always visible, complicity of the Creator. Nothing is devised in heaven without putting into motion the twists and turns of body and soul. And sometimes it is necessary to force events so that justice may be done¹⁷.

The Bible then is replete with the descriptions of the moral lapses of these old men and women, ranging from the humblest to the greatest, such as Abraham and Moses¹⁸. The Bible treats these lapses as so many testimonies to the effort of ethical will that must be deployed at any life stage. The aim then is to reach a level of exemplary behavior and to collaborate personally in the unfinished task which is the creation of the world¹⁹. By the same token it requires that one

¹⁷ Sonia Sarah LIPSYC. *Le livre de Ruth ou le chemin des âmes. De la possession (dibouk) à l'union (dévékout)*, Montréal, Manuscrit déposé à la S.A.C.D., Paris, 1999, p. 20.

¹⁸ Voir, par exemple, ce que certains commentateurs considèrent comme la transgression d'Abram qui fait passer sa très belle épouse Saraï pour sa sœur auprès des Égyptiens, qui l'enlèvent alors pour le palais de Pharaon (*Genèse*, 12, 10-20). Voir aussi, autre exemple, l'adultère commis par le roi David avec Bethsabée, dont il ordonne qu'on place l'époux en danger de mort sur le champ de bataille (2 *Samuel* 11, 1-27).

Voir un exemple concernant une des grandes figures féminines de la Bible, l'accusation d'arrogance portée par quelques commentateurs à l'encontre de Débora, prophétesse, chef militaire et seule femme juge de la Bible (*Juges* 4, 6

¹⁹ La responsabilité de l'individu en matière de contribution à l'achèvement du monde par la mise en acte des commandements de la Thora est véhiculée par la notion fondamentale de *Tikkun*, sur laquelle nous aurons l'occasion de revenir. Voir à ce sujet Schmuël TRIGANO, *Témoigner de la présence de l'absence*.

contribute, as both acted-upon and actor, to the advent of an ethical world, through the succession of generations from the family history of Abraham on.

“For the Israel identity is brought forth into the world: it is engendered, it emerges, as recounted with Jacob, the third of the Patriarchs. All of Abraham did not become Israel; one line of descent branched off. All of Isaac did not become Israel”²⁰.

But for Biblical thought which asserts its adhesion to Revelation, history proceeds as a historic collective effort of the “engendering of a certain way of being human.”

*When the Bible tells us of the history of our ancestors, it is not in order to recount what existed in a past intentionally understood as bygone; it is rather to speak to us of the problems of our profound identity, as it has unfolded starting with the first time it is brought into play of that manner of being human that the Bible names Israel*²¹.

<http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/pourquoi-israel-la-quete-du-sens-de-l-existence-juive/temoigner-de-la-presence-de-l-absence-04-04-2008-7258_4189.php> Page consultée le 25 octobre 2012.

²⁰ Cette œuvre est incarnée, en particulier, par l’obligation d’accomplir la *tsédaka*, c’est-à-dire des actes de justice et de droiture qui contribuent, par l’action humaine, à réaliser le projet divin d’une humanité d’autant plus libre qu’elle agit par choix en faveur d’un monde éthique. L’usage populaire du terme *tsédaka*, utilisé pour recouvrir le fait de faire la charité, illustre l’une des formes de cette justice. « La contribution personnelle active à l’avènement d’un monde juste est une obligation religieuse et morale fondamentale qui s’impose à chacun [...] Elle est, dans le même temps, avec l’étude de la *Tora* et le culte (*avoda*) ce sur quoi le monde repose. » Jean-Christophe ATTIAS et Esther BENBASSA, *Dictionnaire de civilisation juive*, article « Charité et solidarité », 1997, p. 46-47.

²¹ Léon ASKÉNAZI. *La parole et l’écrit*, vol. I, *Penser la tradition juive aujourd’hui*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1999, p. 128.

From the Biblical perspective, age is of less importance than the inner moral and spiritual development of the subject, his way of defining himself in the world and his personal mode of situating himself in reference to the divine plan. The Biblical elder remains a subject who assumes moral responsibility for himself, both for his mistakes and his accomplishments, all within the succession of generations and with a view to the fulfillment of the Divine Plan.

CHAPTER 3
INTEGRATION WITHIN THE FAMILY,
RESPECT AND PRESERVING ONE'S DIGNITY

As opposed to our contemporary Western societies, these Biblical elders are integrated into the life of the family and of the group. They share its labours, as well as all the social and economic aspects of its life. Not only are they masters of their possessions only do their estate of which they are, as we would put it, the managers, but they also direct the work on their own lands and in their own homes. As it is put in Psalms, they assume until “advanced old age,” their role in society. This is evidence less of the old person’s own vitality than of the potential within the life for practical, moral and spiritual fulfilment within the life of the group.

This position is based on the very concrete conviction that any person, at any age and in his / her own manner, can make a contribution to society. A didactic text of practical wisdom, the Book of Proverbs, which devotes but five verses to old age, does so precisely from this point of view. No particular thesis regarding age, but rather reflections which consider the person as a complex subject, responsible for his acts toward himself, his family and the group, throughout his life.

Gray hair is a crown of splendour, through righteousness attained.

(Proverbs 16: 31) We have here reminder of both the importance of the

place of the elderly in society and the reason for this importance. The metaphor of the crown bestows upon them a position of majesty, in the manner of kings. However, this position is based on virtuous behaviour. Old age must be earned. In its version of honour, it constitutes a summit of accomplishment that complements within a healthy society youth's contribution of energy and dynamism. *The splendour of young men is their strength, and the glory of elders, grey hair..* (Proverbs 20:29)

The contribution of both the young and the old to the life of the group refers to the ideal of harmony of family harmony based on mutual respect between generations. It is up to the educator to inculcate to children the values that will insure this harmony. This harmony will then go beyond the bounds of the family so as to encompass the life of the group. These are the ideas that are conveyed by the other three verses that mention old age in the Book of Proverbs:

The crown of elders is sons of sons, and the glory of sons, their fathers (Proverbs 17:6). *Listen to your father who begot you, nor despise your mother when she grows old* (Proverbs 23:22). *Train up lad in the way he should go, when he grows old he will still not swerve from it* (Proverbs 22:6).

Besides these didactic exhortations, an initial evidence of this integration is demonstrated in family life. Ideally, the old people in the Bible, just as much as younger individuals, have their place within the family to the precise extent that the family is conceived as the framework *par excellence* in which one's descendants come into being.

To be a parent constitutes a blessing which expresses the divine blessing itself:

And God blessed them, and God said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it..." (Genesis 1:28). Look, the estate of the Lord is sons, reward is the fruit of the womb. Like arrows in the warrior's hand, thus are the sons born in youth. Happy the man who fills his quiver with them. They shall not be shamed when they speak with their enemies at the gate (Psalms 127:3-5).

The central role played by the family is a *contrario* illustrated in dramatic fashion by the numerous accounts transmitted in Biblical literature of the moral suffering caused by the lack of offsprings. Three of the four Matriarchs are barren which gives rise to ardent prayer, as illustrated by Isaac, the only monogamous Patriarch, who along with Rebecca forms the exemplary loving couple of Biblical narrative: *And Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife, for she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekka his wife conceived* (Genesis 25:21). Equally painful is the rivalry between barren wives and the fertile maidservants or between the two sister-wives that the barrenness causes. *And Rachel saw that she had borne no children to Jacob, and Rachel was jealous of her sister, and she said to Jacob, "Give me sons, for if you don't I'm a dead woman."* (Genesis 30:1).

It is yet another wife, beloved but barren, exhausted by the tears that the fruitful and harassing first wife²², causes her to shed, who takes it

²² « Mais sa rivale [Peninna, première épouse d'Elkana] l'exaspérait sans cesse pour provoquer ses murmures, sur ce que Dieu avait refusé à son sein la fécondité » (*Prophètes, 1 Samuel 1, 5*).

upon herself to address God directly to have a male child. Hanna pleads with God step by step. She confronts God using reasoned arguments based on the ultimate goals of creation and of the divine work themselves. At the same time, Hanna prays with such piety and intensity that even today in Jewish tradition she is the embodiment of sincere and ardent prayer²³:

And she vowed a vow, and said: "Lord of Armies, if you really will look at your servant's woe and remember me, and forget not your servant and give your servant male seed, I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life...And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife and the Lord remembered her. And it happened at the turn of the year that Hannah²⁴ conceived and bore a son and she called his name Samuel, "For from the Lord I asked for him" (Samuel I 1:11, 19-20)

Your wife is like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your house, your children like young olive trees around your table. (Psalms 128:3)

For the Patriarchs, just as for every individual from the midst of the Hebrew people, for man just as for woman, irrespective of the age of any one of them, one's descendants and one's family, are also the sign of the other blessings. These are the perpetuation of the name, the transmission of material inheritance and of the spiritual heritage.

²³ Voir article « Hanna », dans Pauline BEBE. *Isha. Dictionnaire des femmes et du judaïsme*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 2001, p. 148-151. Pour une analyse plus générale de la prière dans le judaïsme, voir Léon ASKÉNAZI. « Approche de la prière juive », dans *La parole et l'écrit. I. Penser la tradition juive aujourd'hui*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1999, p. 367-372.

²⁴ Mère du roi Samuel, seconde épouse d'Elkana qui lui porte un grand amour, Hanna est l'une des sept prophétesses bibliques.

However, the blessing is unique when the parent becomes a grandparent, and then great-grandparent. *And may you see children of your children. Peace upon Israel!* (Psalms 128:6) And it is this same blessing, carried to the fourth generation, which in an even more vividly serves to reward the choice that Joseph makes in order to bring peace to his relationship with his brothers:

And Joseph dwelled in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived a hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw the third generation of sons from Ephraim, and the sons, as well, of Machir son of Manasseh were born on Joseph's knees. (Genesis 50: 22-23).

However, in a fashion that is more urgent and dramatic, the vulnerability of old age calls for the support of the family, the shelter of the family home and the preservation of one's dignity. As with Barzillai, one needs the care of the former as one ages and the proximity of the latter as death approaches. *Let your servant, pray, turn back, that I may die in my own town by the tomb of my father and my mother...* (2 Samuel 19:38). Caring for the elderly is called "honour," which concerns food, clothing and mobility, while preservation of the dignity of the elderly is called "reverence," which is a concern of each and every member of the family.

In classical Jewish tradition, the family is also the locus par excellence of mutual responsibility and interdependence of its members. Consequently, it is the usual shelter against the physical fragilities of old age, which limit, the exercise of a profession and increase the threat of famine, especially in the context of ancient agrarian society

(Kiddush Rabba 82 b). It provides the essential framework for the expression of the reverence of his experience and wisdom, as based on the major commandment: *Honour your father and mother, so that your days may be long on the soil that the Lord your God has given you (Exodus 20:11)*.

The Biblical emphasis on the duty of protection and of reverence in regard to the aged made each family responsible for them. The elderly held a central position in family life, and equally in the organizational structure of the tribes, and then of the kingdoms of Israel.

However, tradition provides no precise rules to meet the needs of impoverished seniors who do not live within a family. Neither does it imagine the creation of any institution destined to insure their safety. For a long time, the attention that was focused on the needy and isolated senior was no different than the attention focused on poverty in general; each member of the community was supposed to apply the same precepts of charity (*tsedakah*) for their benefit. These precepts obligate each member of the community in an explicit and detailed manner toward all the poor of the community. Moreover, every community was – and is still – obligated to provide itself with a charitable fund in order to respect the clear provisions of the Pentateuch in regard to the poor²⁵.

Nevertheless, old age was subject to particular attention in medieval Rabbinic literature that deals with the religious duties to which Jews

²⁵ Article « Charité », dans Geoffrey WIGODER (sous la direction de). *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du Judaïsme*, Paris, Cerf et Robert Laffont, Collection Bouquins, 1996, p. 194-196.

are subject²⁶, as evidenced by Rashi in the eleventh century who designates 60 or 70 years as the age which requires assistance²⁷.

However, the persecutions to which Jewish populations have been subjected throughout the centuries and continents have given the issues of support, care and preservation a particular urgency and specific character.

In the Middle Ages, persecutions broke up families and caused massive migrations across Europe from which the old especially suffered. In the seventeenth century, the massacre of Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe led communities to recall and give new emphasis to the duty for everyone to support the elderly. During the same period, to give but one example, the Jewish community of Rome designated the care of the aged one of the official divisions of its charitable activities. In Amsterdam, to give another example, in 1749 the Sephardic community founded an old age home.

The first breaks in the strongly traditional cohesive family within the Jewish communities occurred during the second half of the eighteenth century. During this period, these communities just like the societies in which they were living, established a distinction between poverty and taking care of the old. Between obedience to the Biblical injunction and

²⁶ Ces questions éthiques font l'objet, au sein du système de jurisprudence rabbinique (*Halakhah*), de règles et procédures (*taqqanot*) : « Les sages savaient qu'aucun code de loi ne peut anticiper toutes les circonstances économiques et sociales à venir et qu'il doit donc contenir une procédure permettant de garantir la loi et l'ordre par l'élaboration de nouvelles règles. Dans la *Halakhah* ces règles sont appelées *taqqanot*. » Article « Halakhah » dans Geoffrey WIGODER ((sous la direction de) *op. cit.*, p. 416.

²⁷ Commentaire du Psaume 71, 17.

respect, between compassion and collective moral sensitivity, the younger generations then saw assistance to the elderly as a matter of social responsibility. The Jewish communities of Europe and elsewhere founded an increasing number of old age homes as part of their networks of mutual assistance²⁸.

This approach, however, was to a considerable extent modified by the same factors, specific to the history of the Jewish people, namely, the massive movement of Jewish populations from one continent to another as a consequence of the pogroms and persecutions of the nineteenth century, especially endemic to Central and Eastern Europe. In the twentieth century, the unprecedented extent and duration of the Nazi persecutions profoundly affected communities all over Europe, wiping out generations and scattering the survivors of the Shoah throughout the world. A decade later, the expulsions and massive dispossession of Jews from all the countries of the Middle East, the equally massive flight from the countries of North Africa, in which they abandoned their possessions in the 1950s and '60s, affected Jewish communities just as dramatically. During the final decade of the twentieth century up to our own time, the emigration of Jews from the ex-Soviet Union to the democracies of the West falls within the same historical dynamic of the Jewish people. The impact of these developments on uprooting and breaking up families, the disappearance of entire generations of men, women and children, loss

²⁸ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Keter Publishing House, Jérusalem, 1972, p. 346-347. À titre d'exemple, la communauté juive d'Allemagne comptait soixante-sept foyers pour les vieux en 1938.

of talent, massive confiscation of property was so great that even today, contemporary Jewish communities continue to confront the issue of support for the aged survivors who are without family or means. In this context, the obligations of aid, support and solidarity toward the most vulnerable members of communities, covered by the laws of *tsedaka*, are added to the Biblical commandment of respect for seniors, i.e., concrete and priority action on their behalf within contemporary Jewish communities.

CHAPTER 4

GROWTH OF THE SUBJECT: CONTINUITY OF IDENTITY

Inasmuch as mutual responsibility is equally intergenerational, tradition expects that the head of the family having reached old age will, to the extent that it is possible, put his affairs in order. He should also give clear indication as to how his estate should be handled.

And Jacob finished charging his sons and he gathered his feet up into his bed, and he breathed his last, and was gathered to his kinfolk (Genesis 49:33).

Since the blessing does set up an appropriate transition between generations for transmitting familial responsibility, as well as the respective rights of each offspring, tradition also expects the older person to accomplish this act in due time:

And he said, "Look, I have grown old; I know not how soon I shall die... and make me a dish of the kind I love and bring it to me that I may eat, so that I may solemnly bless you before I die" (Genesis 27:2,3).

It is then incumbent upon the members of the family to respect, shelter and support the elderly in their own homes. In their turn, it is incumbent upon the latter to look after the family by expressing their final wishes and to insure a smooth transition of responsibility from one generation to another. This two-fold movement highlights the specific position of the older person within the family and hence within society. It is this same two-fold movement, both practical and ethical, which ideally

results in the respect shown toward the deceased and to his final wishes:

And the time drew near that Israel²⁹ must die; and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him: "If now I have found favour in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt" (Genesis 47, 29).

Regarding the commitment to carry out the deceased's last wishes, the commentator Rashi states that it consists of: *Kindness and truth: the kindness that one shows to the dead is a "kindness of truth," since one expects nothing in return.* (Bereshit Rabba 95.6)

Another aspect of social integration of the elderly is seen in the Bible's portraying them at work: *And, look, an old man was coming from his work in the field in the evening. And the man was from the high country of Ephraim and he was in Gibeah, but the people of the place were Benjaminites.* (Judges 19:16)

The concept of retirement, in the modern sense, does not exist in the Bible. Only for Levites was there an end point for their priestly functions: *"From thirty years old up till fifty years old you shall reckon them, all who do army service to do the work in the Tent of Meeting.* (Numbers 4:23) But even here, their withdrawal from active life is not complete. *And from fifty years old he shall come back from the army work and shall work no more. And he shall serve his brothers in the*

²⁹ Israël est le nom donné à Jacob à l'issue de sa lutte avec l'ange (*Pentateuque, Genèse 32, 29*).

*Tent of Meeting to keep watch, but work he shall not do. So shall you do to the Levites in their watch*³⁰ (Numbers 8:25-26).

In fact, advanced old age signals the full flowering and mastery of one's position in society. For example, Boaz – judge, erudite and righteous man and wealthy landowner, who at the age of eighty personally supervises the threshing of grain in his barn so as to prevent theft and immoral behaviour, frequent occurrences at that time³¹. It was in the course of such supervision that he noticed Ruth, designated in the text as “Ruth the Moabitess,” in order to emphasize that she is perceived as a foreigner and that she bears the stigma of this condition. Ruth has come to glean among the ears of grain in Boaz's fields. Boaz who participates in the harvesting takes care to protect this foreign woman from any possible male aggression: “*Your eyes be on the field in which they reap and go after them. Have I not charged the lads not to touch you? Should you be thirsty, you shall go to the pitchers and drink from what the lads draw from the well.*”(Ruth 2:9) It is thus that Boaz obeys the commandment of the Torah regarding generosity and compassion toward the poor. This commandment enjoins upon landowners to leave to the poor the

³⁰ RACHI donne les précisions suivantes sur ce retrait partiel des Lévites (*lewiim*) de leurs fonctions sacerdotales : « Ceci est ce qui est aux lewiim : les années peuvent les rendre inaptés, et non les défauts corporels (‘Houlin 24a). Et il ne servira plus : pour le service du transport sur les épaules (Sifri). Mais il retournera au service de la fermeture des portes, ainsi qu'à celui du chant et du chargement des chariots. C'est ce que veulent dire les mots : “il fera le service “avec” ses frères » (verset suivant), ainsi que le rend le Targoum Onqelos ». Voir site : http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque_Nombres_4_23.aspx.

³¹ Identifié par certains rabbins comme le juge Ibzan de Bethelhem (*Juges*, 12, 8), Booz est considéré comme le grand de sa génération, « le prince du peuple ». *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906), voir site : <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3444-boaz>. Page consultée le 14 octobre 2012.

gleanings, as well as the grain that has been forgotten on all their fields³². By protecting her from any possible masculine aggression, Boaz is doing what has to be done. By being concerned about the welfare of a foreigner, he displays his openness to the humanity of the foreigner. In this respect, his actions reflect the meaning of his name and highlight his courage. Boaz has remained in tradition as *Ish hayil*, the man (*ish*) of valour (*hayil*). His strength is moral strength³³.

And Boaz said to her at mealtime, "Come here and eat of the bread and dip your crust in vinegar." And she sat alongside the reapers, and he bundled together roasted grain for her, and she ate and was sated and left some over. (Ruth 2:14-15) With the first half of this two-part order – asking his servants to intentionally allow more ears of grain to fall on his fields –Boaz combines the commandment concerning gleaners and the one of the laws of *tsedaka*³⁴ which enjoin acts of charity to be performed with discretion and with the greatest possible tact to the person who receives the charity: *It is preferable not to give charity at all than to do so by publicly humiliating the person who receives it.*³⁵

³² « Quand vous moissonnerez la récolte de votre pays, tu laisseras la moisson inachevée au bout de ton champ, et tu ne ramasseras point la glanure de ta moisson. Tu ne grappilleras point dans ta vigne, et tu ne recueilleras point les grains épars de ta vigne. Abandonne-les au pauvre et à l'étranger: je suis l'Éternel votre Dieu » (*Pentateuque, Lévitique* 19, 10).

³³ Booz (ou, selon une autre graphie, Boaz) signifie littéralement « Il y a de la force (oz) en lui », le terme « force » étant entendu au sens de courage moral.

³⁴ *Tsedakah* signifie tout à la fois « charité », « éthique » et « justice ».

³⁵ MAÏMONIDE. *Les lois gouvernant les dons aux pauvres*, cité dans Geoffrey WIGODER (sous la direction de), *op. cit.*, p. 196. Moïse MAÏMONIDE dit (HA) RAMBAM ou MAÏMONIDE (Cordoue, 1138 – Fostat (Égypte) 1204), exégète, décisionnaire, philosophe et médecin, est, comme RACHI, l'une des figures les plus influentes du judaïsme.

The Book of Ruth, which relates these events, occupies a particular place in Biblical literature since it illustrates, around the character of Naomi, among other significant themes, both the fears and the aspirations of the elderly within the family. These fears and aspirations regard keeping alive the names of the deceased and also keeping one's property intact in order to insure livelihood, stability and continuity of the family through history.

The book opens with the departure of Elimelech, "when the judges ruled," at a period of turmoil and disorder in the Land of Israel. Elimelech leaves Bethlehem in the land of Judah when "the house of bread"³⁶ no longer furnishes a livelihood to its inhabitants. He flees from the famine, along with his wife Naomi and his two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, to the plains of Moab. For some commentators, the departure of a wealthy and influential man at a time when the people is undergoing a great trial and what is more, to move to a country associated in the collective memory of Israel with a land of curse³⁷ and

³⁶ Le nom de la ville de Bethléem est composé des termes hébreux *beth* (maison) et *lehem* (pain) soit, littéralement : « La maison du pain ».

³⁷ Des siècles plus tôt, Balak, chef du peuple de Moab demande au prophète Balaam de maudire les Hébreux qui traversent alors le désert. Balaam ne réussira pas à prononcer la malédiction, mais cet épisode conduira Moïse à interdire aux membres du peuple d'Israël d'épouser des Moabites ou, selon certaines sources rabbiniques, à interdire aux filles d'Israël d'épouser des hommes moabites (*Pentateuque, Nombres 22ss*).

inhospitality³⁸, is linked with his early death³⁹. Ten years later, the two sons of Naomi die leaving Orpah and Ruth, their Moabite wives, childless widows. Naomi is desolate, “having been dealt with bitterly”⁴⁰ utterly destitute and completely without hope since her children have died without issue. Now her name will die out with her, she believes.

And she rose, she and her daughters-in-law and turned back from the plains of Moab, for she had heard in the plains of Moab that the Lord had singled out His people to give them bread. (Ruth 1:6) On the way to the land of Judah, she exhorts her daughters-in-law, kindly and on three occasions, to return to their homes to live among their own people and to find new husbands. However, while Orpah does finally turn back, Ruth, who “cleaved unto her,”⁴¹ utters the words that are to this day emblematic of loyalty, in this case loyalty by her own choice, by her marriage, to the people of Israel and its commandments: *And*

³⁸ « Un Ammonite ni un Moabite ne seront admis dans l’assemblée du Seigneur; même après la dixième génération, ils seront exclus de l’assemblée du Seigneur, à perpétuité, parce qu’ils ne vous ont pas offert le pain et l’eau à votre passage, au sortir de l’Égypte, et de plus, parce qu’il a stipendié contre toi Balaam, fils de Beor, de Pethor en Mésopotamie, pour te maudire » (*Pentateuque, Deutéronome 23, 5*).

³⁹ Traité de *Baba Batra 91a et b* du *Talmud de Babylone*, cité par Sonia Sarah LIPSYC, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Noémi est éplorée : « Elle leur dit : "Ne m’appelez plus Noémi, appelez-moi Mara [amère], car l’Éternel m’a abreuvée d’amertume» (*Hagiographes, Ruth 1, 20*).

⁴¹ *Hagiographes, Ruth 1, 14*). L’expression « *VeRuth davekah bah* » rendue ici par « s’attachait à ses pas » et dont le verbe s’appuie sur la racine d.v/b.k (unir, coller) autorise, selon Sonia Sarah LIPSYC, la traduction : « Ruth s’unit à elle [Noémi] ». « Le profond attachement voire l’osmose que charrie ce verbe (à l’infinitif en hébreu, *lidevok*) est d’autant plus prononcé qu’il est suivi de la préposition dans (en hébreu *be*). Cette expression, le plus souvent traduite par s’unir dans ou à, apparaît vingt-six fois dans la Bible. Elle désigne toujours une adhésion puissante entre deux entités ou deux éléments. » Sonia Sarah LIPSYC, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

Ruth said, “Do not entreat me to forsake you⁴², to turn back from you. For wherever you go, I will go. And wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people is my people, and your god is my god. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. So may the Lord do to me or even more, for only death will part you and me.” (Ruth 1: 16-17) Rabbinic commentaries see in this attachment of Ruth for Naomi a proof of her compassion toward her mother-in-law⁴³. Tradition also links the name of Ruth to the “concept of friendship. Indeed, the book is a parable of the themes of loyalty, friendship and love, protection of the widow, of the stranger and the poor.”⁴⁴ From this point of departure on, each character – Ruth, Naomi and Boaz – will do his or her part to insure the perpetuation of Naomi’s family. The Book of Ruth will emphasize two of the closely connected functions in the conceptualization of the family unit for the People of Israel: lineage and the care to be given to the aged.

Naomi now learns the name of her benefactor, and as chance would have it discovers that Boaz is a relative. Taking a broad interpretation

⁴² Au sens de « ne me heurte pas », « ne me vexe pas », dans Yeshaya DALSACE, *La méguilat [Livre] Ruth revisitée. S’ouvrir aux nations*, Akadem, Studio, Paris, juin 2008. <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/themes/limoud/lectures-bibliques/meguilot/s-ouvrir-aux-nations-03-06-2008-7335_238.php>. Page consultée le 14 janvier 2013.

⁴³ Ruth Rabba 2, 13, cité dans Pauline BEBE, *op. cit.* p. 321.

⁴⁴ Pauline BEBE, *op. cit.* p. 315.

of the institution of levirate marriage⁴⁵, she sees the possibility of a marriage between the young Ruth and the elderly Boaz. Such a union would provide a home and happiness for Ruth (Ruth 3:1). It would also produce an heir who would bear the name of Naomi's deceased husband, thus saving Naomi's family from disappearing into oblivion, as well as from destitution⁴⁶. Naomi goes on to advise Ruth in plain terms. Once bathed, dressed, and perfumed, she should seek out Boaz asleep on his bed, after he has finished eating and drinking. Taking such initiative was quite bold, going against the notions of female discretion and modesty of that period. Ruth accepts the suggestion submissively, even at the risk of being completely rejected by the community should the plan fail: "*Whatever you say to me I will do*". (Ruth 3:5) Ruth plays the part of temptress who takes advantage of Boaz's being intoxicated, "and yet the narrator, far from condemning her, describes her as a paragon of virtue"⁴⁷.

After Ruth's nocturnal visit, Boaz takes back the initiative. He first makes sure that the other relative has no interest in Ruth as a wife

⁴⁵ La loi du lévirat (*yiboum*) impose au frère du défunt d'épouser sa belle-sœur lorsque cette dernière n'a pas eu d'enfants. Si le frère du défunt accepte d'épouser la veuve, le premier fils mâle, né de cette union, porte le nom du défunt. Lorsque le frère du défunt refuse d'épouser la veuve, cette dernière peut épouser un autre homme que lui. Dans le *Livre de Ruth*, deux hommes sont parents de Noémi : Peloni Almoni, l'oncle du mari décédé de Ruth, Mahlon, et Booz le cousin de ce dernier. Aucun de ces personnages n'était obligé de se soumettre à la loi du lévirat. C'est pourtant cette loi qu'évoque la dynamique des échanges entre les quatre personnages, échanges qui se terminent par l'union de Booz et de Ruth.

⁴⁶ Si Booz s'unit à Ruth dans l'esprit du lévirat, c'est-à-dire comme s'il était le frère de Mahlon, on peut supposer qu'il remplit en même temps une autre obligation, celle du rachat des terres, qui assure une certaine stabilité familiale en conservant la propriété de la terre : « Si ton frère, se trouvant dans la gêne, a vendu une partie de sa propriété, son plus proche parent aura la faculté de racheter ce qu'a vendu son frère » (*Pentateuque, Lévitique 25, 25*).

⁴⁷ Pauline BEBE, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

before marrying her himself with the avowed purpose of keeping Naomi's family alive through the hope of providing an offspring. Boaz's declaration establishes a close connection between the name which is to be rescued from oblivion and ownership of land, this within the logic of an agrarian society in which ownership of a field is the prime insurance of a decent livelihood: *"And also Ruth the Moabite, wife of Mahlon, I have acquired for myself as wife, to raise up the name of the dead on his estate, that the name of the dead be not cut off from his brothers and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses today."* (Ruth 4:10)

Naomi wants descendants for herself, and this can only be accomplished through a kind of a proxy marriage which will insure a new home for Ruth who complies with this stratagem in order to achieve the same goals. Boaz agrees to be desired as a husband for Ruth by Naomi and by Ruth for herself. Through Ruth, Boaz is Naomi's saviour, insuring that she will enjoy a secure old age within a family that has come back to life. Considered by tradition as a book of friendship, of loyalty and of compassion rewarded⁴⁸, the Book of Ruth is also the book of unending concern for the survival of the name, of perpetuating oneself in one's offspring and hence of the imperative of family continuity.

⁴⁸ Les commentaires rabbiniques voient en Ruth, qui n'a pas abandonné sa belle-mère à son dénuement et à sa solitude, l'exemple de la compassion et de la fidélité à son propre sentiment d'affection. Ils voient également en elle l'exemple de la conversion si sincère qu'elle résiste aux aléas de la vie et reste fidèle à ses choix moraux et théologiques. Le *Livre de Ruth* est, par ce dernier biais, un plaidoyer en faveur de l'ouverture aux nations.

And Boaz took Ruth the Moabite, and she became his wife, and he came to bed with her and the Lord granted her conception and she bore a son. And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the Lord, Who has not deprived you of a redeemer today, and let his name be proclaimed in Israel, and may he be a restorer of life for you and a support in your old age, as your daughter-in-law, whom you love, has borne him, who has been better to you than seven sons." And Naomi took the child and placed him in her lap and became a nurse for him. And the neighbour women called a name for him, saying, "A son is born to Naomi," and they called his name Obed – he was the father of Jesse father of David.
(Ruth 4: 13-17)

A grandson who is the defender, source of consolation and support of his grandmother's old age. A grandmother who see in him the reincarnation of the soul of her deceased son. A widow from a foreign land who is finally recognized and accepted since she is newlywed and has become a mother. Praised by the community for her love of her mother-in-law, she gives up her child to her without uttering a word. A nurturing grandmother who takes on the role of mother. The voice of the people who name the child declaring that he was born to his grandmother, thus confirming that he was desired and conceived for her and for her old age. The story is altogether directed to that goal which is the equivalent of saving the subject from oblivion through the act of procreating. This is the primordial form, both active and literal, of history/ *toldot*, which by means of this regeneration, contributes to the development of the future of the group.

Another characteristic – just as in our own societies – the elders of the Bible connect generations. At the same time, as for example in the case of the Patriarchs, they symbolize the unity of the people, its law,

the continuity of its identity and its historic destiny. Fundamentally different in this respect to the modern vision of the role of age, traditional Jewish sources make the interweaving of this connection a key duty of advanced old age. The difference also lies in the vision itself of the substance of this connection. It involves family and ethics, but it must also contribute in a fundamental manner to the consolidation and renewal of the collective historic narrative-identity of the Jewish people.

The elderly must take responsibility toward themselves since they are commanded to pursue as long as possible their own “tasks,” in particular study⁴⁹. But, at the same time, it also makes them responsible in regard to future generations, since they are enjoined to continue to teach their grandchildren: *The crown of the elders is sons of sons, and the glory of sons, their fathers.* (Proverbs 17:6) Tradition also enjoins teachers, from the greatest to the most modest, to continue to take on disciples⁵⁰.

Contrary to the modern vision of old age as a “golden age” devoted to leisure and “well-deserved rest,” Jewish tradition places advanced old age at the far horizon of a two-fold ideal of fullness of growth. This manifests itself in the pursuit of the fuller development of the subject and the permanence of the transmission of identity, as well as

⁴⁹ *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Yebamoth 62 b : « *Rabbi Akiba said : If a man studied Torah in his youth, he should also study it in his old age; if he had disciples in his youth, he should also have disciples in his old age.* » Voir site: <http://www.come-and-hear.com/yebamoth/yebamoth_62.html>. Page consultée le 14 octobre 2012.

⁵⁰ *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Yebamoth 62 b.

collective moral and spiritual heritage: *And even in hoary old age, O God, do not forsake me. Till I tell of Your mighty arm to the next generation and to all those who will come, Your power.* (Psalms 71:18)

Consequently, while the old men and women of the Bible do experience the physical and moral vicissitudes of aging and extreme old age, they do not experience retirement as defined by contemporary societies in the West, i.e., as a withdrawal from active life in society. They do not “withdraw” or retire from life. Very much on the contrary, they lead or share the daily tasks of the family and the labour of the community. The importance of their role in society does not reduce their concern for living out their old age in the shelter of their own homes and to receive the care and support of their families. In this regard, the survival of the family name through the generations constitutes in itself a value. The family is the locus *par excellence* of intergenerational responsibility. It is the responsibility of the elders to contribute to the historical continuity of the family and to pursue towards their own descendants the teachings that will insure the transmission of the narrative and spiritual identity of Israel.

CHAPTER 5

THE STAGES OF OLD AGE:

A PRACTICAL MORAL GUIDE TO THE EXPERIENCE OF AGING

A very long life is associated with several of the early figures of the Bible: *And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years. Then he died.* (Genesis 5:5) In fact, one of these figures has remained the reference for long life in Western culture: *And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty and nine years. Then he died* (Genesis 5:27) And Noah, more famous for his Ark, is no exception: *And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years. Then he died.* (Genesis 9:29)

The Bible then marks out a second period of less spectacular longevity, but which is nevertheless of legendary proportions for us. This corresponds to the period of the Patriarchs of the Jewish people. Abraham lived to one hundred seventy-five. His wife Sarah, only one of the Matriarchs of the Jewish People whose age is given by the Bible, lived to the age of 127. As for Isaac's son, Jacob, he lived to the age of 147.

The great men and women of Jewish tradition who followed also lived long lives. The greatest of them, Moses, died at 120. Joseph, son of Jacob and of the matriarch Rachel, he who remained in the collective imagination as the favourite child clothed in the coat of many colours,

the object of his brothers' jealousy who went on to become viceroy of Egypt, died at the age of 110 after reconciling with his brothers. Moses' successor, Joshua, lived as long as Joseph.

For all these, a long life was granted in order to accomplish the task so that each one's project, inscribed in the divine project, might in the fullness of time spring up, ripen into fruition, to be fulfilled with contentment. *And Abraham breathed his last and died at a ripe old age, old and sated with years, and he was gathered to his kinfolk.* (Genesis 25:8) Each individual's old age that has found fulfilment is content, and as experienced by these great figures of the Bible, bears benefits and happiness for the nation and Hebrew people.

However, Genesis fixes the limit of human life at one hundred twenty years. According to the commentators, this limit was divine punishment for the carnal excesses of mankind after the fall of Adam to the detriment of the efforts that they should have made toward realizing the ideals of wisdom. These excesses incurred the danger of supplanting the divine spirit and of transforming this spirit into flesh: *And the Lord said, "My breath shall not abide in the human forever, for he is but flesh. Let his days be a hundred and twenty years."* (Genesis 6:3) According to the commentators, that since too long a life does not provoke in the collective human consciousness the urgency of acting toward wisdom, God has determined to issue numerous laws and commandments to guide mankind toward moral perfection⁵¹.

⁵¹ La tradition orale juive considère que l'humanité entière a reçu sept lois, dont six furent révélées à Adam et une loi à Noé, qui constituent, avant le Décalogue, un code éthique universel désigné comme les LOIS NOAHIDES ou commandements de Noé. Aux yeux de cette tradition, quiconque parmi les non-Juifs qui accomplit ces lois fait partie des Justes parmi les nations et a sa part au monde futur. Voir site : Perla Serfaty-Garzon ©. Meaning and Fruitfulness in Late Life. Longevity in the Jewish Tradition. 42

Within the frame provided by the commandments, a long life of 120 years is now sufficient – as it sufficed for Moses to accomplish his immense task – even if the task of one’s days is now much weightier for the ordinary person. “The day is short, the work is great, the workmen are slothful, the reward is rich, and the Master is urgent.”⁵² This vision of the duration of human life is still frequently alluded to in Jewish communities by the wish: “to one hundred and twenty,” pronounced at birthdays. This wish reintroduces for each and every one of us the ideal of a long life modelled on the achievements of Moses.

In a much soberer fashion, the Bible takes note of the duration of human life – and this is the third stage – in the Psalms of David⁵³, i.e., about ten centuries before the common era. This vision of the duration and reality of human life is still valid in our own day: *The days of our years are but seventy years, and if in great strength, eighty years. And their pride is trouble and grief, for swiftly cut down, we fly off.* (Psalms 90:10) In this verse from Psalms, as in other Biblical texts, this vision combines the theme of the brevity of life and the perspective of death which dims its radiance.

<<http://www.akadem.org/medias/documents/Noahides-doc2.pdf>>. Page consultée le 16 octobre 2012.

⁵² « MISHNA Q. R. Tarphon was in the habit of saying: "*The day is short, the work is great, the workmen are slothful, the reward is rich, and the Master is urgent*" , dans *Talmud de Babylone, Traité Aboth*, II, 15,

⁵³ Le *Livre des Psaumes* est, d’après la tradition juive, l’œuvre du roi David, qui a régné il y a environ 1000 ans avant l’ère courante, tandis que certains critiques bibliques contemporains le voient comme une œuvre collective d’auteurs restés anonymes.

In accordance with its role of ethical guide, Pirkei Avot⁵⁴ defines the ages of man to designate for each one the conditions or skills that characterize them. With the purpose of setting norms, just as much later, numerous Christian philosophers and theologians of the Middle Ages up to quite recent times⁵⁵ were to do abundantly and in various ways, this treatise distinguishes four stages of life.

(Judah son of Tema) would also say: Five years is the age for the study of Scripture. Ten, for the study of Mishnah⁵⁶. Thirteen, for the obligation to observe the mitzvot. Fifteen, for the study of Talmud⁵⁷. Eighteen, for marriage. Twenty, to pursue [a livelihood]. Thirty, for strength, Forty, for understanding. Fifty, for counsel. Sixty, for sagacity. Seventy, for elderliness. Eighty, for power. Ninety, for meditation. A hundred-year-old is as one who has died and passed away and has been negated from the world⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ Le *Traité Avot*, traduit le titre original hébreu *Pirke Avot*. Ce dernier est aussi appelé, selon les sources, *Chapitres des pères*, *Éthique des pères* ou *Maximes des pères*, le terme hébreu *avot* pouvant être traduit, de façon significative, à la fois par « pères » et par « principes ». Le traité rassemble des sentences mémorables d'autorités morales et des réflexions de nature principalement éthique. Il couvre environ cinq siècles d'enseignements, depuis environ 300 avant l'ère courante jusqu'à environ 200 de l'ère courante.

⁵⁵ Voir Agostino Paravicini BAGLIANI. « Âges de la vie », *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'Occident médiéval*, 1999, p. 7-9. Voir également Jean-Pierre BOIS, « Âge, pauvreté ou richesse. Observation historique sur la question des vieux et de l'argent », *Gérontologie et société*, 2006/2 n° 117, p. 17. Voir site : <<http://www.cairn.info/revue-gerontologie-et-societe-2006-2-page-15.htm>>. Page consultée le 17 août 2011.

⁵⁶ Dans la tradition juive, Moïse a reçu une Torah écrite – le *Pentateuque* – et une Torah orale, l'une étant complémentaire de l'autre. La Torah orale fut transmise et interprétée durant des siècles puis transcrite au II^e siècle de l'ère courante, pour constituer la *Michna*.

⁵⁷ Texte fondamental du judaïsme rabbinique, le *Talmud* (littéralement « l'étude ») désigne la somme rédactionnelle de la tradition orale élaborée dans les milieux rabbiniques de Babylonie ou de Palestine entre le I^{er} et le VII^e siècles. Le *Talmud* est constitué de la *Michna* et de la *Guémara*, qui rassemble, jusque vers le V^e siècle de l'ère courante, les commentaires des Sages d'Israël sur la *Michna*. Fondement de la loi juive (*Halakha*), le *Talmud* ne le cède en importance qu'au *Pentateuque*.

⁵⁸ *Maxime des pères*, 5, 25. Voir site : <<http://www.massorti.com/Pirke-Avot-Maximes-des-Peres>>. Page consultée le 14 octobre 2012.

All these ages fall within an overall vision of the life that it should be lived. They constitute so many markers for fulfilling the commandment of study which is the first of the commandments. This commandment occupies a central place in Jewish tradition, which prescribes its start at an age now considered to belong to early childhood. Tradition also prescribes it to be pursued and shared with a friend or in a study group for the rest of one's life under the direction of one or several teachers⁵⁹.

The age of ten marks the pursuit of the obligation to study with the introduction in early youth to wider teachings based on interpretations and commentaries of the theological and moral heritage. These teachings and interpretations prepare the young person to be ready to be able, at the age of thirteen, to assume the responsibilities set forth by the commandments and to exercise his judgment to distinguish good from evil and consequently to behave accordingly. In this respect, the age of thirteen, considered by contemporary society as marking the onset of adolescence, corresponds in Jewish tradition to moral, social and religious adulthood. At fifteen, the adolescent – once again according to the current meaning of the term – is a full-fledged adult in the eyes of Jewish tradition, one capable of entering into give-and-take of thought based on questioning. The taste for and love of learning, inculcated from childhood on, is displayed in the capacity to question and go beyond the text. The young adult will go on to broach the vast expanse of examination of all aspects of practical life that are debated

⁵⁹ « Fais-toi un Rav [Maître] et acquiers-toi [*Kané*] un ami! », *Maxime des pères* 1, 6. Voir site : <<http://www.massorti.com/Pirke-Avot-Maximes-des-Peres>>. Page consultée le 14 octobre 2012.

on the moral and concrete levels. He is deemed to be capable of opening himself up and assimilating the heritage of commentaries, interpretations and debates that comprise the “ocean” of Talmud the study of which is traditionally, but not exclusively, considered to be preparation for a career as judge or more generally for the practice of law⁶⁰.

From the age of twenty on, the young adult is ready to start a family and to take on responsibility for it within society. Thirty signifies the prime of life, the fullness of physical and psychological strength in the exercise of a profession. At forty, maturity manifests itself in greater human and social intelligence. Wisdom, in the sense of life experience, is legitimately assumed at fifty, at which age one can already turn to counsel those younger and less experienced. From twenty to sixty, study, work, family and participation in the life of the community comprise the principal axes of the life of the individual.

However, old age in itself comprises four stages, testimony to the fact that old age is not a stable condition, but rather a process and dynamic. What is at stake in this process is nothing less than the significance and calling of long life. The first threshold of this open-

⁶⁰ Aux yeux de la tradition juive, l'étude, de génération en génération, des textes traditionnels que constituent la *Thora*, le *Talmud* et la *Kabbale* ainsi que, plus généralement, la littérature rabbinique, contribue fortement à l'élaboration d'une identité narrative commune et constitue de ce fait l'une des dimensions de la pérennité d'Israël. Cette conviction souligne l'importance, pour le peuple juif, de la continuité des générations et le caractère traumatisant que peut prendre la perspective de la rupture de la fidélité au patrimoine commun.

ended process, situated at the age of sixty, is called “seniority”⁶¹ to signify the age of maturity, the definitive taking leave of one’s youth and point of entry into a still vigorous old age. Seventy marks the time for dying, following the example of King David, who was both old and according to the Biblical expression which has become emblematic to emphasize contentment and plenitude, “full of years”. “*And he died in a good old age⁶², full of days, riches, and honour; and Solomon his son reigned in his stead*” (Chronicles I 29:28).

When old age goes beyond this limit, it inspires with even greater force using the term “venerability, the respect which is owed to the “hoary head, a form of respect that Leviticus requires of each person with such gravity that this prescription is inseparable from the reminder of the very existence of God and awe for Him. “*Before a gray head you shall rise, and you shall defer to an elder and fear your God. I am the Lord⁶³*” (Leviticus 19:32). Everyone’s fulfilment of the duty of respect for elders is in its turn rewarded with a long life: “*Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God charged you, so that your days may be long and so that He may do well with you on the soil that the Lord your God has given you*” (Deuteronomy 5:16).

⁶¹ Le terme hébraïque utilisé est alors *zaken*.

⁶² « *Besevah tovah* » est ici traduit par « heureuse vieillesse », le terme *beseva* étant dérivé de *seva*, *sevah*, qui signifient : vieillard, grison. Marc M. COHN. *Lexique hébreu-français*, Tel-Aviv, édition Achiassaf, 1978, p. 334. L’expression « *sava yamim* », contient le verbe *lisboa* signifiant « être rassasié ». Le sens littéral de cette expression est « rassasié de jours », en une tournure métaphorique décrivant l’action de vieillir qui vient, dans l’évocation de la fin de la vie du roi David, magnifier la clôture d’une vie accomplie par une heureuse vieillesse.

⁶³ *Lévitique* 19, 32. Élie MUNK. *La voix de la Thora*, 1992, p. 165.

Eighty marks the beginning of a glorious age. Extra years have been granted to order to allow one to turn old age into an exceptional period of one's life. The added strength, not given to everyone but only "à la rigueur" beyond the normal lifespan, must in order to be meaningful involve transcending oneself and overcoming the bitterness inspired by the prospect of death, a prospect which extinguishes the radiance of one's life which subjectively is always thought to be too brief.

"At ninety, (one reaches) meditation"⁶⁴. This refers to depth of thought, inner life and return to one's intimate self. This is also the time in which the body slumps, bends over and leans down to the ground, as if toward the tomb and yet there is still time to make one's life worthwhile, through meditation, reflexion and one's inner resources.

The outer limit of longevity considered as a blessing is, according to the commentators, that of the centenarian, the figure of which is alluded to in the inspired vision of Jerusalem become subject of joy: "*There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man, that hath not filled his days; for the youngest shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed*" (Isaiah 65:20). However, beyond this limit, even if the old person is still physically present in the world, what can one entrust to his weakness? He is, "like a dead man," inasmuch as he is absent from the social

⁶⁴ *Traité Avot* 5, 25. Le terme hébraïque utilisé est *la chouah* qui signifie à la fois la profondeur de la pensée et le fait de se courber, double sens qui évoque l'univers de l'intériorité dont témoigne par exemple une autre traduction de cette phrase : « *Ninety [is the age] for [a] bending [figure]* », *Traité Aboth*, Seder Nezikin, dans *Mishnayoth*, New York, Yavne Press, Inc. 1965, p. 535.

community, and his soul is already preoccupied with the world to come. The commentators point out the rare exceptions to this condition, those that brilliantly illustrate the vision of extreme long life as a blessing. They go on to emphasize the persistence of the physical, intellectual and moral qualities of the old person. In this manner, the Book of Deuteronomy specifies regarding Moses, Judaism's exceptional figure: *"And Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eye had not grown bleary and his sap had not fled"* (Deuteronomy 34:7).

CHAPITRE 6

LONGEVITY: BETWEEN BLESSINGS, DUTIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Advanced old age is not something one is owed, but rather a reward that is granted collectively, in the first place to the nation when it leads an ethical life in accordance with Divine commandments. From this point of view, morality, happiness and the long life of the people of Israel go together to the point of becoming one. The blissful life of the nation can only be that of a nation on the path of ethics.

In all the way that the Lord your God has charged you shall you go, so that you may live and it will be well with you, and you will long endure on the land of which you take hold. (Deuteronomy 5:30)

And you shall keep all the command which I charge you today, so that you may be strong and come and take hold of the land into which you are about to cross to take hold of it, and so that you may long endure on the soil that the Lord your God swore to your fathers to give to them and to their seed, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Deuteronomy 11:8-9)

The longevity of the nation is thus a collective responsibility. However – and this is the second point – each person assumes his portion of responsibility so that the promise of long life should be fulfilled not only for the nation on its Promised Land, but also for them, in this world and also for their descendants. The close connection between the life of the individual and the life of the nation is emphasized especially in this passage which is directed in the first place to the nation. Only then

does it call directly upon the subject himself and to place him before a three-fold personal responsibility in regard to longevity: toward himself, toward the nation and toward his descendants.

*“And this is the command, the statute and the laws that the Lord your God has charged you to teach you to do in the land into which you are about to cross to take hold of it. So that will fear the Lord your God to keep all His statutes and His commands which I charge you – you and your son and your son’s son, all the days of your life; and so that your days will be long.
(Deuteronomy 6:1-2)*

Direct address and injunction combine, just as moral destiny of the subject and of the nation combine, to bring on long life. In this regard, the Biblical ideal of personal responsibility toward the group echoes that of the family and the community toward its most vulnerable members, which includes senior citizens. The ethical path and shared responsibility remain the keywords.

In particular, from with this fundamental position, longevity is worthwhile in and of itself since it preserves life, which is itself an ethical value in and of itself in the eyes of Jewish tradition:

And you shall keep His statutes and His commands which I am about to charge you today, that He do well with you and with your sons after you and so that you long endure on the soil that the Lord your God is about to give you for all time. (Deuteronomy 4:40)

To love the Lord your God, to heed His voice, and to cling to Him, for He is your life and your length of days to dwell on the soil which the Lord your God swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, to give to them. (Deuteronomy 30:20)

Moreover, the very notion of personal moral life as a merit on which longevity is grounded is based on obedience to the fundamental commandments the significance of which is both foundational and universal as on the commandments that provide the framework for daily life and its activities from the most ordinary to the most exceptional. In regard to the basic commandments, long life rewards the respect shown to parents: *“Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long on the soil that the Lord your God has given you”* (Exodus 20:11). In the area of the principles that guide one’s life, here is an example of the rejection of greed and the choice of material restraint: *“Who hates ill-gotten gains will have length of days”* (Proverbs 28:16). Another example is choosing wisdom: *“Happy is the man who has found wisdom, and the man who acquires discernment... Length of days are in her right hand, and in her left hand wealth and honour”* (Proverbs 3:13, 16).

As for the acts that constitute the very substance of everyday life, long life also rewards integrity in business transactions: *“A whole and honest weight-stone you shall have; a whole and honest measure you shall have, so that you may enjoy length of days on the soil that the Lord your God is about to give you. For the abhorrence of the Lord your God is anyone who does all these things, who commits any fraud”* (Deuteronomy 25:15-16).

Finally, longevity is not merely a positive experience that one hopes for oneself, but also a valuable attainment that one must teach one’s

offsprings to acquire, in accordance with the instruction received before the Hebrew people entered the Land of Israel:

And Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel. And he said to them, "Set your heart unto all these words with which I bear witness against you today; that you charge your sons with them to do all the words of this teaching. For it is not an empty thing for you, but it is your life; and through this thing you will long endure on the soil to which you are about to cross the Jordan to take hold of it there." (Deuteronomy 32:45-47)

This advice is later taken over by King Solomon in the same concern for transmitting a heritage that will preserve the future and its potential for positivity: *"My son, do not forget my teaching, and let your heart keep my commands. For length of days and years of life and peace they add for you"* (Proverbs 3:1-2).

Advanced old age is not then something which one is owed, but a valuable attainment which secures life, a reward and a benediction, and just as much a mission to assume personally in order to fulfill one's responsibilities toward the Jewish people and towards one's descendants. Consequently, the elderly must "do something" moral with their old age and for this must transcend the vicissitudes, the bitterness of the feeling of the brevity of life and the anguish of death.

CHAPTER 7

PHYSICAL SIGNS OF OLD AGE

AND SHIFTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE

While it is true that Jewish tradition refers to a long life as a blessing, it does not shirk from describing its sombre physical, psychological and moral characteristics. One does not frequently find descriptions of the loss of strength and of the physical infirmities of advanced old age in the Bible. However, each one of them plays an important role in the unfolding of events, bears with it historical consequences and serves to bring about a shift in the collective history of the people of Israel.

Thus, in regard to Isaac's blindness, which the text connects explicitly to his age: "*And it happened when Isaac was old, that his eyes grew too bleary to see...* (Genesis 27:1). The text expresses just as explicitly Isaac's intention to bless Esau, his first-born son, before he dies.

Jacob, Esau's twin (but younger) brother⁶⁵, taking advantage of Isaac's blindness, upon the advice of his mother Rebecca, uses trickery to pass himself off as Esau. He obtains his father's blessing which make him in his turn a patriarch of the Jewish people. Rashi sees several explanations for Isaac's blindness, one of which imparts a historical finality to it: "Another explanation: so that Jacob would be the one to

⁶⁵ Parce que né immédiatement après Ésaü, ce que le texte rend par l'image selon laquelle Jacob est né tenant à la main le talon d'Ésaü (*Pentateuque, Genèse 25; 26*).

receive the blessings” (Bereshit Rabba 65:8)⁶⁶. It is no accident that Isaac is blind. His blindness is part and parcel of a historical project which concerns the entire people. It is the fact and event that creates the time and space allowing of the successful accomplishment of the prophecy of Jacob’s destiny as a patriarch⁶⁷.

This explanation also introduces a two-fold level of intentionality in the project of Esau’s blessing. The first level is explicit. By his blessing and with God’s approval, Isaac wishes to express his love for his son Esau who respects him and returns his love⁶⁸. Esau remains the Biblical character who represents respect for the father. The second level of intentionality is hidden because it falls within the realization of the divine will to choose Jacob (and where the psychoanalyst would see the father’s subconscious at work in regard to the destinies that he glimpses for each one of his sons. And, indeed, once he has gotten over the trembling that seizes him and the feeling of seeing hell open

⁶⁶ Commentaire de RACHI de *Pentateuque*, *Genèse 27*, 1.

⁶⁷ Rébecca, mère d’Ésaü et de Jacob, ayant interrogé Dieu à propos de sa grossesse, reçoit une réponse prophétique : elle sera mère de deux enfants qui seront à l’origine de deux nations. Elle représente le seul cas où Dieu s’adresse à une matriarche. Pour un développement sur cette prophétie et le comportement de Rébecca et Jacob dans cette séquence de la *Genèse*, voir Philippe HADDAD, (2009) *Jacob et Ésaü. La fraternité dans la Genèse*, site : <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/cours/la-fraternite-dans-la-bible/jacob-et-esau-02-07-2009-7802_4230.php>. Page consultée le 14 novembre 2012.

⁶⁸ *Pentateuque*, *Genèse 27*, 7 : « Apporte-moi du gibier et apprête-moi un ragoût que je mangerai et je te bénirai devant le Seigneur avant de mourir. » Commentaire de Rachi de *Pentateuque*, *Genèse 27*, 7 : *Devant Hachem Avec Son assentiment, car Il me donnera son accord.* »

up under his feet⁶⁹, confirms Jacob's blessing: "*And Isaac was seized with a very great trembling and he said, "Who is it, then, who caught game and brought it to me and I ate everything before you came and blessed him"*" (Genesis 27:33). Thus, Isaac in his innermost self acknowledges the meaning of his action, which at first seemed involuntary. By confirming the impetus that Rebecca has given to collective destiny, Isaac acts in the sense of history. Isaac's blindness, in this going counter to a powerful tradition, oversees the reversal of Esau's birthright in favour of the younger brother Jacob. This reversal is moreover one of the recurrent themes of the Hebrew Bible. In order to advance the divine project, the normal order of things must be reversed and the younger brother can take the place of the older. Even if this upsetting of the natural order should entail great trials, it enters into the divine plan, that is of collective history and destiny⁷⁰.

Still on the subject of physical pains of growing old, the Bible relates the history of King David, old and sick. He has lost control of the affairs

⁶⁹ Commentaire de RACHI de *Pentateuque, Genèse 27, 33* : « Fut saisi d'un très grand tremblement. Le *Targoum* traduit par un mot qui marque une grande stupéfaction. Et d'après le midrash, il a vu l'enfer ouvert sous ses pieds, [c'est-à-dire sous les pieds de 'Essaw (Gour aryé)]. »

⁷⁰ Jacob est resté dans la tradition comme celui des deux fils d'Isaac qui a la conviction d'être le meilleur porteur pour la réalisation de la promesse faite à Abraham d'un univers plus moral. En ce sens, il aspire à devenir « l'aîné du monde » et il accepte d'en assumer les difficultés. Il reste à tort, dans la mémoire populaire, comme celui qui agit par ruse (*bé-Mirma*). L'origine de cette image se trouve dans la traduction erronée de *bé-Mirma* qui signifie, dans le langage biblique : « sagesse ». Jacob est sage parce qu'il est capable de s'évaluer à sa juste valeur. Pour un examen plus approfondi de ce sujet, voir Alain MICHEL (2008), *Toledot : le sens d'un conflit fraternel*, dans *Autour du droit d'aînesse* - n° 6, site : http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5769/parachat-hachavoua-5769/toledot-le-sens-d-un-conflit-fraternel-20-11-2008-7472_4310.php. Page consultée le 12 novembre 2012.

of the kingdom. Above all, in a narrative that has remained emblematic, he is no longer able to keep himself warm. We find his servants sent out throughout the kingdom to find a young woman who can restore the king's "warmth."

And King David had grown old, advanced in years, and they covered him with bedclothes, but he was not warm. And his servants said to him, "Let them seek out for my lord the king a young virgin, that she may wait upon the king and become his familiar, and lie in your lap, and my lord the king will be warm." And they sought out a beautiful young woman through all the territory of Israel, and they found Abishag the Shunamite and brought her to the king. And the young woman was very beautiful, and she became a familiar to the king and ministered to him, but the king knew her not. (Kings I:1-4)

It is very tempting to see in this "the king knew her not" a sign of the sexual impotence that strikes the king in his old age, an explanation which is bolstered by his political impotence. However, the cold which takes hold of David is not of a sexual nature. Having been chosen in order to warm the king, and hence employed as an instrument with a therapeutic objective, Abishag – according to tradition – is supposed to have desired the king and to have expressed the wish to bear his heir who could have then become king. David, who according to tradition, had eighteen wives and numerous concubines, as was allowed by the laws of the time, in this particular case, according to the commentators, chose to not have relations with Abishag. He chose to resist the two-fold danger that she represented⁷¹.

⁷¹ Sur le refus du roi David d'avoir commerce avec Abisag malgré le froid qu'il ressentait, la chosification de celle-ci et un développement des enjeux à la fois politiques et fantasmatiques de son instrumentalisation, voir Yeshaya DALSACE (2009), *La mystérieuse Avishag n° 5. Une femme fatale* (Haye Perla Serfaty-Garzon ©. Meaning and Fruitfulness in Late Life. Longevity in the Jewish Tradition. 57

For the name of this exceptionally beautiful young virgin means: *my father has increased*, or *my father has caused to grow*, a self-evident sexual and phallic symbol. In Hebrew she is called a *sokhenet*, which means “a servant,” but which also suggests danger (*sakanah*). And indeed, she will become an object of desire by Adonijah, one of David’s sons. However, the king-to-be Solomon, another one of David’s sons, who also desires her, will not allow this. Out of this interplay of violent and thwarted sexual desires will arise the civil war in the course of which Solomon will kill his brother Adonijah.

Abishag conveys danger, but she is also silent; nothing is known about her⁷². She and the old king form an odd couple. Beautiful and arousing men’s desires, she represents youth and the potential of new life. Above all, she fills the world of male fantasy. This masculine world discovers itself through her and thereby falls into the category of upheavals of passion. Thus, “she embodies the central political issues for the masculine component of human beings, that is representation and share of feminine component.”⁷³

The Talmud imagines Abishag as a spectator, incapable of satisfying her desire, silently watching a scene of repeated sexual intercourse

Sara), site : <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5770/haftarat-hachavoua-5770/une-femme-fatale-haye-sara-03-11-2009-7929_4315.php>. Page consultée le 14 novembre 2012.

⁷² Yeshaya DALSACE, *op. cit.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

between David and Bathsheba⁷⁴. This scene rules out the interpretation of the king's sexual impotence and highlights his having chosen to resist his sexual impulse, he whose entire past history bears witness to the contrary. This demonstrates that his old age is more knowledgeable in regard to how much importance is to be conceded, or not conceded, to the masculine universe of fantasy and sexual impulse at every stage of life, and especially in old age. This refusal, which must be recognized as late-in-life wisdom, unleashes in time a civil war which in its turn has an impact on the history of the kings of Israel. David does not go where everyone, in view of his past life and his "great lack of heat," expected him to go. This choice is one of old age. It takes on the stature of a historical event with serious human and political stakes.

Thus, we see that old age continues to take part in life, and suffers all its moral vicissitudes, as well as the physical ones. It is the physical ones that play a part in Biblical literature in the articulation and shifts of the history of the Jewish people. Each one of them in its own particular manner drives history forward in a new direction, in a chain of events that require one to take a new look at events. It also requires one to assume their social, moral, theological, as well as historical impact. It is in this respect that the physical signs of old age are doubly significant since they convey multiple meanings on the collective level, as well as teachings on the level of the individual.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 8

GROWING OLD AND GROWING WEAK, BETWEEN MELANCHOLY AND SERENITY

The heading of the vicissitudes of old age continues with the theme of the decline of moral authority and the loss of social status. The figure of Eli the Priest⁷⁵, ninety-eight years old, illustrates the danger, for the most eminent as well as for the ordinary person, of the loss of moral authority in old age. The end of his life takes on a doubly tragic dimension on this account. Not only has he completely lost his standing in the eyes of his children, who are profligate and criminal, but he is also the last one of his line to reach old age:

And Eli was very old. And he heard all that his sons did to all the Israelites, and that they lay with the women who flocked to the entrance of the Tent of Assembly. And he said to them, "Why do you do such things of which I hear – evil things about you from all these people? No, my sons! For it is not good, what I hear that the Lord's people are spreading about. If a man offends against man, God may intercede for him, but if against the Lord a man should offend, who can intercede for him?" And they did not heed their father's voice, for the Lord wanted to put them to death. (1 Samuel 2:22-25)

⁷⁵ « Or, en ce temps-là, Héli, dont les yeux commençaient à s'obscurcir et qui y voyait à peine, était couché à sa place habituelle » (*Prophètes, 1 Samuel 3, 2*). « Celui-ci avait alors quatre-vingt-dix-huit ans; ses yeux étaient immobiles, il ne pouvait plus voir » (*Prophètes, 1 Samuel 4, 15*).

Eli dies quite literally from grief and despair, upon hearing the announcement of his sons' death and of the loss of the Holy Ark. The end of his life is not only dramatic, but also represents a complete break from his life's work: *"And the moment he mentioned the Ark of God, Eli fell backward from his chair through the gate and his neckbone was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy."* (1 Samuel 4:18)

As for the judge and prophet Samuel, old age equally marks the end of moral authority over his descendants, but also as a direct consequence, the loss of his status as judge: *"Look, you yourself have grown old and your sons have not gone in your ways. So now, set over us a king to rule us, like all the nations."* (1 Samuel 8:5) Samuel acknowledges his twofold decline. He heeds the elders' request, but only after expressing his own sadness and melancholy and calling to mind the great judge that he was for many years.

In the same way, many old people today speak of the bold actions of their youth and the accomplishments of their mature years: *"And so now the king walks before you, and I have grown old and gray, and my sons, they are here with you, and I have before you from my youth till day. Here I am!"* (1 Samuel 12:2)

Two of the kings of Israel, remembered as the greatest, in their old age become ineffective, even within their own households. David is overtaken by palace intrigues. He sees his own son and spoiled child, Adonijah, proclaim himself king. (1 Kings 1:50) As for Solomon, he is

led astray in his old age by his too numerous wives and hence by his lust. He is induced to adopt pagan cults that cause this wise ruler to be unfaithful to himself and to his heritage:

And King Solomon loved many foreign women – Pharaoh’s daughter and Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, Hittites, from the nations of which the Lord had said to the Israelites, “You shall not come among them and they not come among you, for they will surely lead your heart astray after their gods.” To these did Solomon cling in love. And he had seven hundred princess wives and three hundred concubines, and his wives led his heart astray. And it happened in Solomon’s old age that his wives led his heart astray after other gods, and his heart was not whole with the Lord his God like the heart of David his father. (I Kings 11:1-4)

Loss of moral authority, loss of independence and self-respect, loss of the strength to remain faithful to oneself and to one’s heritage: for everyone, old age is lived at the risk of these afflictions, to which must be added those, of all places and times, involving the exploitation of the old by wicked people, of loneliness, of physical weakness that makes one fearful⁷⁶.

The time of a human lifetime is quite finite: *“You engulf them with sleep. In the morn hey are like grass that passes. In the morning it sprouts and passes, by evening it withers and dies.”* (Psalms 90:5-6)

Other psychological issues, as well as the sentiment that any life, even if it were to last eighty years (Psalms 90:10) is brief, impart to Job’s

⁷⁶ Parmi les 150 poèmes religieux qui composent les *Psaumes*, deux seulement traitent de la vieillesse : tandis que le *Psaume* 90 évoque la brièveté de la vie, le *Psaume* 71 traite de l’expérience intime et sociale de la vulnérabilité de la vieillesse.

days a melancholy and desperate resonance: *“My days are swifter than the weaver's shuttle. They snap off without any hope. (Job 7:6) And my days are swifter than a courier. They have fled and have never seen good, slipped away like reed ships, like an eagle swooping on prey.” (Job 9:25-26) “Man born of woman, scant of days and sated with trouble, like a blossom he comes forth and wither, and flees like a shadow – he will not stay.” (Job 14:1-2)*

However, the sense of the brevity of life has a moral purpose since it makes spiritual or ethical action within the family necessary and urgent, above anything else. The perspective of death gives meaning and value to the happiness in the here-and-now and the reparative actions that the choice of life entails: *“I am sickened – I won't live forever. Let me be, for my days are mere breath. (Job 7:16) And why do you not pardon my crime and let my sin pass away? For soon I shall lie in the dust. You will seek me, and I shall be gone.” (Job 7:21)*

Sick, grieving, a ruined man, unable to grasp the meaning of this divine retribution, Job by turns accuses, implores, calls God to account to be accorded respite and forgiveness before it is too late. The urgency of redress, for these actions and for himself, stems from the tragic sense of the brevity of life. Here we are far from an ideal or idyllic vision of the days of a long life and much closer to a conception of an elusive life that allows neither rest nor the tranquillity of happiness.

And what can be said of the manner in which the old Barzilai depicts himself to King David? At the age of eighty, the life that is still ahead is

counted in days. Moral judgment is weakened. The senses have dulled and no longer allow one to fully appreciate life. At least, at this age, another aspect of the ethical purposefulness of old age is possessing the wisdom to avoid becoming a burden for other. At least, one knows how to forego honours. Old age also knows how to demonstrate sufficient realism and resignation to withdraw to one's home, close to one's final residence, in a kind of return to one's abode, that of one's parents.

And Barzilai was very aged, eighty years old, and he had provided for the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. And the king said to Barzilai, "You, cross over with me, and I shall provide for you by me in Jerusalem." And Barzilai said to the king, "How many are the days of the years of my life that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? Eighty years old I am today. Do I know between good and evil? Does your servant taste what I eat and what I drink? Do I still hear the voice of men and women singing? And why should your servant still be a burden on my lord the king? Your servant can barely cross over the Jordan, and why should the king give me this recompense? Let your servant, pray, turn back, that I may die in my own town by the tomb of my father and mother. (2 Samuel 19:33-38)

Barzilai is aware that he is near death. He suffers from the decline of his intellectual and mental agility, from the loss of his ability to take rapid decisions and of his discernment. He knows that hence he is losing the ability to remain master of his own life. So he returns to his own town, that is to the place of his parents' tomb is located there. It is with this insight that he distances himself from the world, that he readies himself to take on his place in the generations of his own

lineage, and thus he comes back to himself. If indeed he is melancholy, perhaps resigned, he is nonetheless far from the calling to account, the revolt and the anguish of redress before death that Job expressed in addressing God.

As we see, the physical infirmities of age, but even more, examining one's own aging and its psychological consequences, do not spare the old age of Biblical figures. Old age always involves the possibility of suffering and of being of a time in which one will be unfaithful to oneself and one's heritage. It may involve betrayal and loss of the moral authority that ideally should go along with it.

What is essential is the vision of old age as beyond this. It resides first of all in the fact that physical and moral vicissitudes constitute articulations in the collective historical discourse of the Jewish people. This discourse takes on a particular direction as a result of these articulations. The questions about aging and melancholy, indeed about the depression of aging, are posed in the exploration of the ultimate meaning of old age.

However, and this is the second point, they do not override the fundamental Jewish conception of the value *per se*, and *a fortiori*, long life, even while any form of ancestor worship is not permitted in Judaism. This is demonstrated in Ecclesiastes, the book that, outside of its rabbinic readings, is supposedly the very book of depressive old age.

CHAPTER 9

GROWING OLD AND MEANING TRANSFORMED: KOHELET

Another man sees himself growing old. He also feels the approach of death. This old man is Kohelet⁷⁷, the one who speaks to an assembled multitude in order to impart the fruit of his experience and transmit his wisdom to them. He is known as Ecclesiastes⁷⁸, “the one who gathers.” And here is the heart-rending portrait of aging by which he ends his discourse to the assembled people:

And recall your Creator in the days of your prime, until the days of evil come, and the years arrive, when you say, “I have no delight in them.” Until the sun goes dark, and the light and the moon and the stars, and the clouds come back after the rain.

⁷⁷ Kohélet signifie, en hébreu, « celui qui s'adresse à l'assemblée ». Nous adoptons ici la graphie utilisée dans : *La Bible. Traduction du Rabbinate. Akadem Multimedia*. <http://www.sefarim.fr/>. D'autres graphies, par exemple Qohélet, sont utilisées dans d'autres traductions de la Bible et la littérature non biblique. Nous respecterons ces graphies dans le cas de citations.

⁷⁸Dans la traduction grecque de la Bible hébraïque, dite des Septante, le titre du livre *Kohélet* est littéralement traduit par le terme *L'Ecclésiaste*. *Kohélet* fait partie des *Ketouvim* (*Les Hagiographes*). Il constitue un sommet de poésie et de rythme, un traité mélancolique du vécu du vieillir, mais aussi de la sagesse. Il reste très actuel, après avoir été marquant durant des siècles. Son retentissement va bien au-delà du champ de la tradition juive. Il figure d'ailleurs parmi les textes bibliques les plus commentés à ce jour. S'ouvrant sur la vanité de toutes choses jusqu'à heurter de front certains des articles de foi du judaïsme, il opère un renversement vers la sagesse avant de se clore de manière dramatique sur la crainte révérentielle de Dieu comme seule voie pour l'être humain.

Kohélet est l'œuvre de la vieillesse du roi Salomon, venant après les *Proverbes*, qui sont l'œuvre de sa maturité, tandis que le *Cantique des cantiques* est l'œuvre de sa jeunesse. Cette position est celle de la tradition juive. Elle s'appuie en particulier sur la façon dont l'auteur ouvre le texte : « Paroles de Kohélet, fils de David, roi à Jérusalem » (1, 1), et poursuit quelques versets plus loin : « Moi, Kohélet, je suis devenu roi d'Israël, à Jérusalem » (1, 12). La position traditionnelle juive s'appuie également sur les similarités stylistiques entre *Kohélet* et les deux autres œuvres du roi Salomon, en particulier *Le Cantique des cantiques* et, enfin, sur la sagesse légendaire de ce dernier, illustrée, entre autres, par ses *Proverbes*.

On the day that the guards of the house will quake and the stalwart men be twisted, and the maids who grind grow idle, for they are now few, and those who look from the casements go down. And the double doors close in the market as the sound of the mill sinks down, and the sound of the bird arises, and all the songstresses are bowed. Of the very height they are afraid, and terror is in the road. And the almond blossoms, and the locust tree is laden, and the caper-fruit falls apart. For man is going to his everlasting house and the mourners turn round in the market. (Ecclesiastes 12:1-5)

There is nothing to add regarding the losses and failings, changes that plunge body and soul into melancholy when death looms on the horizon. This horizon inspires the still familiar verses of disillusionment by which Kohelet opens: *“Merest breath, said Qohelet. Merest breath. All is mere breath. What gain is there for man in all his toil that he toils under the sun. A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth endures forever.”*⁷⁹ All through the first half of the text, it is the perspective of death, of one’s own disappearance, that voids for the old man all the accomplishments he has achieved, as well as all the objects of his past pursuits. He takes stock and passes in review his behaviour and his actions in order to then disparage them, one by one, as vain things. His meditation on his labours, which were based on desire, now leaves him empty-handed and overcome by bitterness.

⁷⁹ *Hagiographes, Ecclésiaste 1, 2-4.* Nombre de phrases toujours courantes témoignent de l’influence, dans notre culture, de la vision de Kohélet, telles que : « Il n’y a rien de nouveau sous le soleil » (1, 7). « Il y a un temps pour tout » (3, 1), etc.

For Kohelet has loved, accumulated wealth, gained in wisdom, and worn himself out in order to be able to transmit the fruit of his labours to the one who will come after him. However, by the light of the dark sun of his melancholy, it is rather destructiveness which is at work and which leads him to take stock of his life reducing all of his accomplishments and all his attachments to *hevel*⁸⁰, the ephemeral and elusive vapour of vanity. *“He who loves money will not be sated with money, and he who loves wealth will have no crop. This, too, is mere breath.”* (Ecclesiastes 5:9) Vanity regarding display of wealth: *“I made me great works. I built myself houses, I planted for myself vineyards.”* (Ecclesiastes 2:4) Vanity of labour: *“And I turned about in all my deeds that my hands had done and in the toil that I had toiled to do, and, look, all was mere breath and herding of wind, and there was no gain under the sun.”* (Ecclesiastes 2:11) Vanity also of love, denounced through the violent denunciation of “the woman”: *“And I find woman more bitter than death. For she is all snares, and nets her heart, and fetters her arms. He who is good before God will escape her, and an offender will be trapped by her.”* (Ecclesiastes 7:26)

A bitter admission of the vanity of wisdom itself, which often goes unsung, and which proves to be of no help when the vicissitudes of old age pile up, and which becomes a source of torture when the awareness that death is at hand becomes impossible to ignore:

⁸⁰ La traduction du terme hébreu *hevel* qui ouvre *Kohélet*, et dont la répétition traduit le mouvement de la spirale dépressive dans laquelle sombre le vieil Ecclésiaste, est « vapeur, buée », mais aussi « vanité, inanité, futilité ». Voir Marc M. COHN, *Lexique hébreu-français*, p. 66. Nous reviendrons sur l'importance de cette polysémie.

I spoke to my heart, saying: As for me, look, I increased and added wisdom beyond all who were before me over Jerusalem, and my heart has seen much wisdom and knowledge. And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know revelry and folly for this, too, is herding the wind. For in much wisdom is much worry, and who adds wisdom adds pain. (Ecclesiastes 1:16-18)

Especially intolerable in the face of death is the vanity of wisdom, that makes no distinction between the wise man and the fool. What good is wisdom, where is divine justice when death plunges all beings into non-being, without distinction of their earthly efforts to attain the world to come: *“This is the evil in all that is done under the sun, for all have a single fate, and also the heart of the sons of man is full of evil, and mad revelry in their heart while they live, and afterward – off to the dead.”* (Ecclesiastes 9:3)

What good is wisdom when the prospect of death reduces the very mastery of one’s life to nothingness:

For every happening has a time of judgment, for man’s evil is heavy upon him. For one knows not what will be, for what will be – who can tell of it? No man has power over the wind, to shut in the wind, and there is no power over the day of death, and there is no sending away from war... (Ecclesiastes 8:6-8)

And what about transmission of the heritage to the next generation, so central to the Jewish vision of life? At the risk of leading them to despair, he warns his youthful audience in the most severe terms of the divine retribution for the pleasures of youth: *“Rejoice, young man, in your youth; and let thy heart be merry in the days of your prime and go about in the ways of your heart and what eyes see. But know that for all these God will bring you to judgment.”* (Ecclesiastes 11:9)

Like many other elders, now as in the past, Kohelet is consumed with regret for his youth. And like them, he envies their joys and the freedom of youthful delights. Like them, his life assessment is tarnished with the sense of what is unfinished in what his life has been.

The very hope of handing down even material possessions is just as vain as it reveals our powerlessness to influence the future in order to protect the fruit of one's past labour: "*And I hated all things got from my toil that I had toiled under the sun, that I should leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool, and he have power over all that was got from my toil for which I toiled and grew wise under the sun. This, too, is mere breath.*" (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19)

Just as vain is the hope of being remembered by future generations, something to which Jewish tradition accords equal importance. Thus, any illusion of eternity is brought to naught, and thus the prospect of sinking into non-being that is death is rendered literally unbearable.

And does not this oblivion that strikes both the righteous and the wicked constitute a scandal in the face of divine justice? How can one not loathe life itself when the annihilation of self is near? "*For there is no remembrance of the wise, as with the fool, forever. Since in the days to come, all will be forgotten. Yes, the wise dies like the fool. And*

I hated life, for all that was done under the sun was evil to me.”

(Ecclesiastes 2:16-17) The threat of falling back into non-being⁸¹ is so intolerable and the pain is so great that it arouses a powerful nostalgia in Kohelet: *“And I praised the dead, who have already died, more than the living, who are still alive. And better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.”*

(Ecclesiastes 4:2-3)

How then can one not say to this young audience that this world is frozen and that it is meaningless? This gathering will inevitably be replaced by another, and every generation will in its turn be wiped away from the memory of men, even while the earth remains unmoved, eternally indifferent to man and his suffering: “One generation: “One generation passes away, and another generation comes: but the earth abides forever.” The movements of the universe are repetitive, wearisome to Kohelet’s soul. *“The sun rises and the sun sets, and to its place it glides, there it rises.”* (Ecclesiastes 1:5) Everything is fixed, predictable, and mechanistic: these are not the movements of life. *“All the rivers go to the sea, and the sea is not full.”* (Ecclesiastes 1:7)

Kohelet says “I.” This personal discourse comes from his intimate experience of aging. It is grounded both in observation and experience.

⁸¹ Jean-Marc TALPIN. « Lire *le vieillir* avec l’Ecclésiaste : le bilan de vie entre dépression et sagesse », dans Alain MONTANDON, (Études réunies par) *Éros, blessures et folie. Détresses du vieillir*, Clermont-Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2006, p. 19.

It unfolds repetitively since it is, again and again, seeking an answer to the question of meaning of his own existence on earth. Kohelet, like the philosophers of the absurd, does not find this response⁸².

However, Kohelet's vision goes beyond melancholy. Imbued with doubt, it goes back to attitudes generally considered as virtues, such as a high degree of piety: "*Watch your step when you go to the house of God, for understanding is more favoured than the offering of sacrifice by fools, for they do not know even how to do evil.*" (Ecclesiastes 4:17) This counsel of moderation sounds like an anti-ritual position, even against the Temple itself⁸³ and puts into question the validity of the major teaching: "Simon the Righteous said, "The world stands on three pillars: Torah, the Temple service and good deeds."⁸⁴

It also contradicts an article of Jewish faith in that Kohelet knows nothing of the world to come⁸⁵, the world of souls, the world of reward and punishments for everyday actions, and the world of the fullness of Messianic times. "*All that your hand manages to do with your strength do, for there is no doing nor reckoning nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol where you are going.*"⁸⁶

⁸² Yeshaya DALSACE (2007), « Vanité des vanités. Kohélet ou la critique de la civilisation » Voir site : <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/themes/limoud/lectures-bibliques/cain-et-abel/kohelet-ou-la-critique-de-la-civilisation-06-11-2007-7088_236.php>. Page consultée le 2 novembre 2012.

⁸³ Yeshaya DALSACE (2007), *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Maxime des Pères, 1, 2. Voir site

⁸⁵ En hébreu *olam haba*.

⁸⁶ *Hagiographes, Ecclésiaste 9, 10.* « Le *Cheol* terme hébraïque intraduisible à l'étymologie incertaine désigne le séjour des morts ou la sépulture commune de l'humanité. Les positions divergent quant à son statut : est-ce ou non un au-delà? Aussi connu comme *Dumah* ou la maison (le lieu) du silence, la Perla Serfaty-Garzon ©. Meaning and Fruitfulness in Late Life. Longevity in the Jewish Tradition. 72

Finally, Kohelet clashes with the teachings of Judaism when he depicts existence as absurd and Heaven as silent, unjust and cruel. Moreover, his human universe, in the very manner of the physical universe, is fixed forever: “*The crooked cannot turn straight nor can the lack be made good.*” (Ecclesiastes 1:15)

By asserting that the world is nothing but what it is, a present always like itself, Kohelet opposes the notion, central in the eyes of Judaism, of *Tikkun*⁸⁷. This concept posits the incompleteness of the world as the divine plan which enjoins upon the human being to freely choose to work for its completion through ethical action according to the commandments of the Torah. The Torah presents human existence as located within a universe having emerged from original chaos, but still undergoing repair and restoration. The world is only the approximation of its plan. As for man, having been created to make it known that there is still much to be done in creation to perfect it. His part is to be a partner with God in this undertaking.

Another Thought of Aging

Kohelet is generally considered of as the book *par excellence* of

dernière et éternelle demeure, sombre, chaotique, poussiéreuse et effrayante. Certains textes (*Psaumes* 86; 13) mentionnent ceux qui en sont sauvés ou en remontent. Voir site : <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13563-sheol>. Page consultée le 7 novembre 2012.

⁸⁷ Le terme hébreu *Tikkun* signifie « redresser, rectifier, réparer, corriger ». Voir Marc M. COHN, *Lexique hébreu-français*, p. 373. Voir, sur la notion de *Tikkun*, Shmuel TRIGANO (2008), *Pourquoi Israël (3/8) Témoigner de l'absence*, site : http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/pourquoi-israel-la-quete-du-sens-de-l-existence-juive/temoigner-de-la-presence-de-l-absence-04-04-2008-7258_4189.php. Page consultée le 25 octobre 2012.

depressed old age. In view of the questioning of several of the central articles of faith of Judaism, this text might also be considered the book of scepticism. However, the overall tone of the second part of the text⁸⁸ depicts another universe, another experience and another way of thinking about aging.

By the time Kohelet has finished his examination of the subjects of his bitter inventory of his life, he has gone well beyond melancholy and doubt. He goes on to translate them on the mode of wisdom in order to summon humanity to joy and happiness: *“And I praised merriment, for there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat and to drink and to make merry, and that will attend him in all his toil in the days of his life that God gives him under the sun.”* (Ecclesiastes 8:15)

Wisdom is defined in so many counsels of moderation regarding various aspects of life: eating and drinking, love and work, even including justice and piety: *“Do not be over-righteous and do not be over-wise. Why should you be dumbfounded.”* (Ecclesiastes 7:16) *“Be not rash with your mouth, and let your heart not hurry to utter a word before God. For God is in the heavens and you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few.”* (Ecclesiastes 5:1)

Rabbinic readings of Ecclesiastes, like other readings, especially psychoanalytical, question the reversal of perspective of this man, old

⁸⁸ *L'Ecclésiaste* comporte douze chapitres. La tonalité du texte change dès le cinquième chapitre, pour se poursuivre en crescendo jusqu'à sa conclusion.

and full of life experience, who sees death approaching and who addresses a youthful audience in such a personal manner. They see the key to understanding this reversal of perspective in the most famous term of the text: “*hevel*” (vanity).

The concept of “*hevel*,” with which the book opens, is developed through every form of melancholy, then is integrated into a vision of wisdom, before bringing the text to a conclusion by the praise of joy and a summons to happiness. One must live happy, in a kind of *carpe diem* of equilibrium and serenity, a condition that touches every aspect of life and which confers upon it a fundamental existential meaning since everything is indeed *hevel*. The old man’s perception turns into an essentially didactic approach:

Until the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is smashed, and the pitcher is broken against the well, and the jug smashed at the pit. And dust returns to the earth as it was, and the life-breath returns to God Who gave it, merest breath, said Qohelet. All is mere breath. (Ecclesiastes 12:6-8)

The translation of *hevel* as “vanity” is rightfully and even today an integral part of the heritage of Kohelet within Western culture. But this translation is accepted at the cost of the larger and more complex etymological meaning of the word *hevel* in Hebrew: “breath, breathing in, vapour, mist, precarious existence.” From the opening words of Kohelet, the precariousness of existence renders vain, in the eyes of the man who feels himself growing old, all his accomplishments and objects of his effort. At the same time, it is in the very name of the acute

consciousness of the vanity of the excess of youthful pursuits that old age pulls regains self-mastery in order to live in joyfulness. It is on this account that old age counsels youth to foreswear excess in life's actions and projects and to opt rather – as old age must do – for moderation, joy and happiness.

Life as a Breath

The rabbinic readings of the Book of Ecclesiastes see in the figure of Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve, the very foundation of Kohelet's vision of life and wisdom⁸⁹. Abel, that is to say precisely, "*Hevel*." In Hebrew. Connecting the two is unavoidable for anyone who knows that Jewish tradition sees one's name as a statement about the "essence" of the one who bears it, something about his own nature, his unique character, indeed sometimes an entire life program, a mission and a destiny, however open-ended or full of conflict it may be.

Who then is Abel-*Hevel*? A herdsman of small livestock, a shepherd who knows how to lead these animals gently -- animals that it is easy to treat well since they are usually docile. Abel does not deal with large livestock, something which requires strength, energy and a certain degree of violence. Abel moves, in the manner of shepherds and the way a breath moves. He is attuned to movement and taking a breath, only taking in from without what can be assimilated or interiorized before being exhaled. He also embodies a contemplative existence,

⁸⁹ Yeshaya DALSACE (2007), *op. cit.*

one that produces nothing that keep shim rooted to the soil. His gaze is not fixed on the earth and its fruits⁹⁰. And what remains of Abel for us? The memory of a brief existence brought to nought by Cain's crime. Abel also represents what is intangible, what breathes and moves, for whom material existence quickly disappears giving way to an insubstantial trace, like that of memory.

In any case, Kohelet – whoever he is – knows his Genesis. From the very first verses of his text, he says that everything goes back to *Hevel*, to Abel⁹¹ that everything goes back to an awareness of the precariousness of life, which is a breath, a fragile but fundamental act of taking a breath. Abel stands for reducing the role accorded to material objects, pulling back from greed and from the accumulation of wealth. He then stands in opposition to Cain, the sedentary cultivator of the land whose descendants will go on to build cities with their artistic, technological and economic riches, all in a single place and dependent on material possessions.

In the context of the wrenching contradiction experienced by the Jewish people, between spatial wandering and inner movement on the one hand, and the dream of rootedness, and rebuilding Jerusalem on the other, Kohelet asserts that the true essence of man is in Abel's path, not in Cain's. The choice is of an existential and spiritual order.

⁹⁰ Gilles BERNHEIM (2007), *La rencontre impossible. Caïn et Abel*. Voir site : http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/cours/les-points-durs-de-la-tora/cain-et-abel-03-12-2007-7106_4246.php. Page consultée le 9 novembre 2012.

⁹¹ Yeshay DALSACE (2007), *op. cit.*

Its consequences will of necessity be historical. From the beginning of his poem, Kohelet proclaims this choice. But the old man's experience had to take place and be assimilated before he would be able to grasp the meaning that has to be given to the life that remains to be lived. Hence, the text opens with the initial state of mind – melancholy, disillusioned, full of doubt and scepticism – of aging, before going on to clarification: the essential resides in the very vanity of things. This vanity then inevitably becomes the base principle of a way of life of joy and happiness. It is here that the fruit of old Kohelet's wisdom is to be found.

To Love and to Work

What does a psychoanalytical reading of Kohelet add to the old man's mission of transmitting his message? The idea, which does not stand in contradiction to the Rabbinic reading, that the term *hevel* refers to the "nothing," from which the subject returns after the inner journey and introspection that is represented by an analytic cure:

As in analysis, isn't this end the revelation of what was at the origin and what spurred the action [...]: *hevel*, ultimately, what is it? It is nothingness. The world of men, their agitation, are dominated by this nothingness [...] if these works are vain, it is because they seek to fill the void left by the lost object, which cannot be found [...] and whose nostalgia drives us down the multiple paths of desire.⁹²

Once one has overcome the grieving for '*hevel*,' for the precariousness, the fragility, the vanity, and the 'nothing' of one's

⁹² Gérard HADDAD (2008), *op. cit.*

existence, the frantic pursuits come to an end. Kohelet did not give into the temptation of the lethal spiral. Having overcome psychic death, he has overcome the absence of God: *“The last word, all being heard: fear God and keep His commands, for that is all humankind.”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13) It is from this inner space that he can at last describe the way of happiness, which is also his own, to his youthful audience, viz. to love and to work⁹³. This is the way of *Abel-Hevel*, set out in lyric terms:

Enjoy life with a woman whom you love all your days of mere breath that have been given to you under the sun, all your days of mere breath, for that is your share in life and in your toil that you toil under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 9:9)

Sombre old age. The pain of acknowledging the centrality of the nothing. And at all times, the awe-inspiring divine presence, and the law and commandments which demand that one take care of life before anything else.

What then is the worth of the time that remains to live for one who is growing old when death is on the near horizon? Barzilai's singular response is to withdraw from the world and its activities. This withdrawal is melancholy and leads him to make his way in full awareness to his final home. He is also at peace. In this respect, he acts with dignity and inspires respect.

Kohelet's response, just as singular, lies in the way that old age has experienced the precariousness of life in view of the very existence of

⁹³ *Ibid.*

death itself: one must live happy and wise, and one must point this out to the next generation. It is there that we find the obligations of old age. In the happiness of the 'here-and-now' and in the transmission of wisdom that underlies it. Overcoming grieving confers its dignity on this happiness. As for wisdom, it supplies the reasons to respect this happiness. And both fall into the horizon of the generations to come.

Thus, the process of aging brings peace to the heart allowing it to continue into an authentic life, always for each one in its own way. A true life since it is turned in serenity, in the manner of Barzilai, toward its preparation for the world to come. Or a true life because it is engaged in the present and fruitful in the manner of Job, whose God "blesses the end of life" and *saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations.*" (Job 42:16) Or, finally, having achieved, in the manner of Kohelet, victory over oneself, one attains true life of joy and wisdom intimately linked to the transmission of the heritage that brings clarity to a major facet of Jewish tradition.

CHAPTER 10

RESPECT FOR AGE AND CIVIL HARMONY

Above and beyond the contributions of individuals – Job, Boaz, Barzilai or Kohelet – in defining the process of aging in Jewish tradition, there must be added the connotations of the Hebrew words for growing old which to a considerable extent clarify in ethical terms the meaning and practical impact of this process.

As a point of departure, the meaning of the word *zaken* ('old') is connected with the term *zakan* ("beard") since a grey beard is the most striking sign of old age. The word *zaken* is first used to speak of Abraham, then to refer to other remarkable Biblical figures, such as the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, the prophets Joshua, Eli and Samuel, and King David⁹⁴. In several instances, the term is clarified with the addition of the expression *ba-yamim* ("advanced in life"). The technique of repetition seems to emphasize old age, as aging, i.e., advancing in age as a dynamic movement: "*And Abraham was old, well stricken in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.*"⁹⁵

Ziknah, meaning "old age" and *zikunim* ("advanced old age") are derived from *zaken*. The other terms relating to aging are *sevah* ("old

⁹⁴ Article « Old Age », in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906). Voir site: <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/891-age-old>>. Page consultée le 28 novembre 2012.

⁹⁵ « Or Abraham était vieux, avancé dans la vie », traduction de : « *Veavraham zaken ba bayamim* ». (*Pentateuque, Genèse 24, 1*).

age”) and *yashish* (“old man”)⁹⁶. *Be-sevah tovah* designs old age as a blessing and reflects the notion of contentment and happiness⁹⁷. The emblematic expression *seva be-yamim* (‘satiety of years’) is both positive and poetic, as well. Other equally lyrical and life-affirming expression *melo yamim* (fullness of years) and *kabbir yamim* (rich in years).

Of the two terms most used for Old Age, *sebah* designated a greater age than *ziknah*. In the Mishnah Ab. v. 21, where the ages of man are enumerated, the age of sixty is called *ziknah*, while that of seventy is called *sebah*. In the Bible itself (Ps xc) we find but one definite statement of the limit of life: “The days of our life are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength, they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow (Ps xc: 10) In the Talmud we find a similar statement: “If one dies at eighty, he has reached old age (MK 28a, BB 75a)⁹⁸

Zaken, with its explicit association with the beard (*zakan*) as one of the signs of old age, is thus associated with the respect owed to the hoary head, but also to that of leader and notable. To cite one more example, this is shown by the fact that only the elders sat on the Sanhedrin, the highest tribunal of the Jewish people:

The base forms, therefore the hypernyms, of the semantic field of old age, come from the root *z.k.n*, from which are derived the verb *zaken*, *zakan* (has grown old) and the noun / adjective form *zaken* (old). These two are found in the Bible, along with other less common forms. From the root *z.k.n* are derived the

⁹⁶ « Parmi nous aussi il est des gens vénérables par l’âge(שִׁישִׁי), des vieillards plus riches de jours que ton père » (*Hagiographes, Job 15, 10*).

⁹⁷ Dieu s’adresse à Abraham : Pour toi, tu rejoindras paisiblement tes pères; tu seras enterré après une vieillesse heureuse. «*be-sebah tova* » : בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה. (*Pentateuque, Genèse 15, 15*).

⁹⁸ Article « *Old Age* », *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906.

noun/adjective *zaken*. Beside this hypernym, we are interested here in two others: the noun forms *kashish* (Talmudic) and *yashish* (Biblical)⁹⁹

The word *zaken* in the Bible and Talmud signifies “old,” “worthy of respect,” and “leader.” Its primary meaning of “old” is well illustrated in the example: There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age. (Zechariah 8:4), as well as in this example: The elder and the man of rank, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. (Isaiah 9:14) It is associated with the notion of veneration (men of rank) and the metonymic meaning of “head” (*ha-rosh*). This latter connection is evidenced by its Latin equivalent leader, from “caput” = head). In “And the elders of the community shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the Lord, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the Lord (Leviticus 4:15), “*zikney ha-edah*” literally means “the old men of the community,” and in “The mighty man, and the man of war; the judge, and the prophet, and the diviner, and the elder (Isaiah 3:2), it refers to “men of rank.” (Weizman & Shelef)¹⁰⁰

However, while a man of rank or a chief may often be aged, the object of the major moral commandment enunciated in Leviticus¹⁰¹ is the respect due to the old, irrespective of their social status. Ethics asserts itself at this point to provide a greater depth to the semantic field of the Hebrew words for aging. What is at stake in these words is the place that the old occupy within society and the everyday behaviour toward them.

⁹⁹ Les deux termes désignant une personne âgée.

¹⁰⁰ Elda WEIZMAN et Nitsa SHELEF. « Le champ sémantique de la vieillesse en hébreu », dans Alain MONTANDON (Études rassemblées par), *Les mots du vieillir*, Clermont-Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2004, p. 58-59.

¹⁰¹ « Lève-toi devant une tête blanche, et honore la personne du vieillard, crains ton Dieu! Je suis l'Éternel » (*Pentateuque, Lévitique* 19, 32).

And indeed, the position according to which the commandment articulated in Leviticus targets respect owed to any old person is a matter of debate among the greatest authorities of tradition. Rashi comments: “You shall rise before old age. I might have thought that it was required to do before an unworthy old person. So it is written later on: “old person,” and there is no “old person” except one who has acquired wisdom.” (Kiddushin 32b)¹⁰² In this way, we are reminded of the equivalence established by the Talmud between old age and wisdom¹⁰³. This same authority will nevertheless entrust each person the choice, so long as he or she bases him/herself on moral commandments, to show or not to show respect toward any particular old person:

And you shall respect the elderly: What is meant by “respecting” [the elderly]? One may not sit in his place, speak in his stead [when it is the elder’s turn to speak], or contradict him. [Since one is obligated to rise before the elderly only when the latter enters within one’s four cubits,] one might think that he may close his eyes [when the elder approaches], as if he did not see him [and thus evade the obligation to rise before him]! Therefore Scripture adds here, “and you shall fear your God,” for this matter is privately known to the one who commits it, and no one knows about it except the person himself, and, concerning any matter known only in the heart [of one person,], Scripture says, “and you shall fear your God,” [for God knows man’s thoughts].¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Commentaire de RACHI du *Lévitique*, *Kedochim*, 19, 32, voir site : http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque_L%E9vitique_19_32.aspx.

¹⁰³ La citation, tirée du *Talmud*, *Qiddouchin* 32 b, à laquelle RACHI se réfère, établit la synonymie entre vieillesse et sagesse : « Le vieux, c’est celui qui a acquis la sagesse ».

¹⁰⁴ Commentaire de RACHI du *Lévitique*, *Kedochim*, 19, 32, *op. cit.*

However, “according to Rabbinic tradition, the word *old person* here refers to “a man of wisdom”; by this passage from Leviticus, one is exhorted to respect and honour learned men. [...] Rise before he who is learned in the law.”¹⁰⁵

Rambam¹⁰⁶ enriches this commentary significantly by emphasizing that “this verse from Leviticus contains the obligation to conduct oneself with modesty [...], i.e., to be modest and humble before the aged. According to the Talmud, any old person, from whatever human culture to which he may belong, is owed respect, even on the part of scholars.”

One must rise before a man who has reached a very advanced age, even if he is not a learned man. Even a learned man who is young must rise before an old man. [However, the former] is not obligated to rise to his full height, but sufficiently to show respect to him. One must even show respect to a non-Jewish old man by one’s words, and one must extend one’s hand to assist him, as it said: “Rise before a hoary head”; this includes any hoary head.¹⁰⁷

Thus, age takes precedence over knowledge, and the distinction between wisdom and old age is made. Jewish tradition resolves the debate in favour of the respect toward any aged person, provided that he or she does not embody evil. This resolution of the debate is both moral and of a practical nature since it implies the obligation to

¹⁰⁵ *Le guide des égarés. Traité de Théologie et de Philosophie* par Moïse BEN MAÏMOUN dit MAÏMONIDE. Publié pour la première fois dans l’original arabe et accompagné d’une traduction française et de notes critiques littéraires et explicatives par S. MUNK, Membre de l’Institut et professeur au Collège de France, tome troisième, Paris, Chez A. Franck, Libraire, 1866, page 275.

¹⁰⁶ Moïse MAÏMONIDE dit (HA) RAMBAM ou MAÏMONIDE.

¹⁰⁷ *Michné Torah de Maïmonide, Sefer Madda 6, 9*, voir site : http://www.fr.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/898359/jewish/Chapitre-Six.htm. Page consultée le 12 novembre 2012.

everyday behaviour grounded in moral commandments. The concrete aspect of this injunction remains to this day part and parcel of Jewish culture, as illustrated, one example among others, by the fact that [in Israel], “the commandment [“Rise before a hoary head”] “honour the elderly” [continues to be] posted [in the very words of the Hebrew Bible] in trains and buses¹⁰⁸.

We see a consistency between the permanent character of the command in Leviticus and the most ancient Biblical texts which consider death at an advanced age to be the sign of divine blessing: “*As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace, you shall be buried in ripe old age.*” (Genesis 15:15) The reward of long life is in domestic happiness, in a flawless household enriched by numerous descendants, in a departure for the world to come in dignity and at the right time: “*And you shall know that your tent is peaceful, probe your home and find nothing amiss. And you shall know that your seed is abundant, your offspring like the grass of the earth. You shall come to the grave in vigor, as grain shocks mount in their season.*” (Job 5:24-26)

This very ancient concept persists. As we have seen, it coexists with other, later approaches of the thresholds, the obligations and the worth of the ages of life¹⁰⁹. In the same way, the conceptual proximity

¹⁰⁸ Elda WEIZMAN et Nitsa SHELEF, *op. cit.* p. 66.

¹⁰⁹ Voir le développement que nous avons consacré plus haut à la question des âges de la vie et des paliers de la vieillesse ainsi qu’aux sources : *Genèse* 6, 3; *Psaumes* 90, 10; *Maxime des pères* 5, 25.

between advanced age and wisdom remains high, but they are not considered synonyms. Joseph is wise even as a young man, and from his wisdom derives his success despite trials and tribulations: “*And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that all that he did the Lord made succeed in his hand.*” (Genesis 39:3)

King Solomon was also so wise in his youth that he addresses God in a dream to ask, not for wealth or political power, but rather for “an understanding heart,” that is, the ability to act humanely and at the same time, the ability to grasp reality in order to govern well. A prayer in which goodness and a sense of duty stand out so much will be answered and rewarded by an exceptional stature:

And now, O Lord my God, You Yourself made Your servant king in place of my father when I was a young lad, not knowing how to lead into the fray.” And Your servant was in the midst of Your people that You chose, a multitudinous people that could not be numbered and could not be counted for multitude. May You give Your servant an understanding heart to discern between good and evil, for who can judge this vast people of Yours”? And the thing was good in the eyes of the Lord that Solomon asked for this thing. And God said to him, “In as much as you have asked for this thing and did not ask long life for yourself and did not ask wealth for yourself and did not ask for the life of your enemies, but you asked to discern and understand justice, I am doing according to your words. Look, I give you a wise and discerning heart, so that your like there will not have been before you, and after you none like you shall arise...”. (I Kings 3: 7-12)

To the verse: “*In the aged is wisdom, and in length of days understanding*” (Job 12:12) comes the response from the very same book of Job:

And Elihu waited out Job's words, for they were his elders. And Elihu saw that the three men could utter no answer, and his anger flared. And Elihu the son of Berachel spoke up and said: I am young in years, and you are aged. Therefore was I awed and feared to speak my mind with you. I thought. Let years speak, and let great age make wisdom known. Yet it is a spirit in man, and Shaddai's breath that grants insight. It is not the elders that are wise nor the aged who understand judgment. (Job 32: 4-9)

This passage highlights the Jewish vision of wisdom, which contrasts in a virtually radical fashion with the Western vision of the sage, which comes down from ancient Greek philosophy: "Western philosophy is a philosophy of answers."¹¹⁰ From this latter perspective, the sage is the one who can respond in a manner which is both comprehensible and coherent to questions asked by man. He is also the one who accepts the world as it is and comes to treat it with emotional detachment. And finally, he is one whose action is guided by an ethical concern.

As for the Jewish perspective, it sees the sage, young or old, male or female, who is always a learner, whatever the level of knowledge or study that he or she has attained. The sage (*Hakham*) is continually pondering the questions posed by human existence and constantly examining the texts, commentaries and their interpretations. He is called "*Talmid Hakham*," that is, "student of the wise," because he accepts the dynamic of questions and debates. Thus, this Jewish perspective refutes any concept of knowledge that would present itself

¹¹⁰ Emmanuel LEVINAS. *De Dieu, qui vient à l'Idée*. Paris, Vrin, 1982, p. 136.

as absolute and complete¹¹¹. It is up to the wise man to remain “student of the wise” in his old age.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that this position has its limits. This is illustrated, *a contrario*, by the fundamental importance of the commandment of respect for the elderly, whether or not they are learned. This fact is equally illustrated in the manner in which the Bible treats lack of respect toward the aged. Lack of respect is in itself the sign of a severe punishment to which all Israel is subjected: “*I was wroth with My people, I profaned Mine inheritance, and gave them into thy hand; thou didst show them no mercy; upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke.*” (Isaiah 47:6) On the part of society, this lack of respect betrays corruption and immorality: “*The anger of the Lord hath divided them; He will no more regard them; they respected not the persons of the priests, they were not gracious unto the elders.*”¹¹² (Lamentations 4:16) On the part of the enemy, it demonstrates total cruelty: “*A fierce-faced nation that will show no favourable face to an old man and will not pity a lad.*” (Deuteronomy 28:50) And finally, the curse of the reversal of roles – the role that should be that of youth to the detriment of the role that should be accorded to the elderly for the sake of social harmony – is a source of discord, immorality and

¹¹¹Aaron D. PANKEN (2005). *The Rhetoric of Innovation. Self-Conscious Legal Change in Rabbinic Literature*, University Press of America. Voir site: <<http://huc.edu/chronicle/65/articles/Excerpt.pdf>>. Page consultée le 18 décembre 2012.

¹¹² Voir Mishnah (sotah 49b), Talmud de Babylone : « Youths will put old men to shame, the old will stand up in the presence of the young, a son will revile his father, a daughter will rise against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be the members of his household », site : <http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_49.html#PARTb>. Page consultée le 12 novembre 2012.

anarchy: *“And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. And the people shall oppress one another, every man his fellow, and every man his neighbour; the child shall behave insolently against the aged, and the base against the honourable.”* (Isaiah 3:4-5)

In the same fashion, the importance of the role bestowed on the old person in society and that of the respect shown toward him is highlighted by the emblematic role reserved for him in the depiction in Jewish tradition of the peaceful city, just and contented social order in a Jerusalem being reborn: *“Thus, saith the Lord of hosts: There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age.”* (Zechariah 8:4) In this image, idyllic as is suitable for a prophetic account, the presence of old men and women in the public space constitutes the very symbol of peace, security and civil harmony.

In Jewish sources, the respect for the aged, whether they are learned or not, versed in the study of Torah or not, members of the Jewish people or not, remains a moral imperative combined with practical advice. Moreover, it constitutes a sure indication of the moral condition of the community. Finally, it is an integral part of a peaceful society. From this point of view, respect for the aged constitutes one of the principal values advocated by Jewish tradition.

CHAPTER 11

BEYOND THE VICISSITUDES OF AGE:

RESPECT, WARMTH AND DIGNITY

“Do not fling me away in old age, as my strength fails, do not forsake me.” (Psalms 71:9) This famous verse is still often chanted, is still moving for numerous audiences and still serves as a motto for not a few charitable organizations. It highlights the fact that respect toward old age must equally and especially be expressed when the afflictions of age become evident to the old person. In regard to the many forms of dependency, and in particular those of advanced old age which causes self-awareness to fade away, Rabbinic commentators have stipulated not only the obligation of respect for old people afflicted with “forgetfulness,” but also concern for their dignity, and at the same time, the assistance that must be provided them.

In a fundamental manner, the assistance which must be distributed to the old person, who is no longer “there” for himself, is characterized as “honour” or “warmth”:

In order to dispel the cloud (and therefore forgetfulness), one must honour the person affected with forgetfulness. Indeed, the verse states:

“The *kavod* (respect) of God is like a consuming fire.” (Exodus 24) The term *kavod* signifies honour and dignity. The recognition of the dignity of the other warms the heart and enables one not to die from the point

of view of society, from that cold death that leaves human beings to whom no one still pays attention frozen. What is required is to honour with warmth the individual who no longer remembers so that he may encounter the cloud: The kavod of God has appeared in the cloud. (Exodus 16) This cloud tears itself open (The God of *kavod* thunders on great waters.” (Psalm 29), like the cloud placed over the eyes¹¹³.

Hence, the association of the notions of respect, honour and preserving dignity with the concept of warmth is symptomatic of the necessity of “warming” the subject afflicted with “forgetfulness” through an affirmation of common humanity, as well as by a respectful presence:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (who lived in the early 3rd century) told his children: “Attend to the old man who despite himself has forgotten what he learned, since the (Second) Tablets of the Covenant and the broken pieces of the (first) Tablets were (both) placed inside the Holy Ark.”¹¹⁴ Let us not forget that the first Tablets of the Law were broken by Moses when the Children of Israel indulged in the idolatrous cult of the Golden Calf and the second were granted by the favour of God’s forgiveness. In regard to this Talmudic teaching, Rashi, the great medieval commentator from Troyes, explains: As for (the old person) who has fallen ill or who, troubled by the difficulty of supporting himself, (has forgotten), attend to honouring him (lekhabdo¹¹⁵).

¹¹³ Jacky MILEWSKI (2011) *Dignité dans l’oubli. Méditation talmudique*. Espace national de réflexion éthique sur la maladie d’Alzheimer, site : <http://www.espace-ethique-alzheimer.org/ressourcesdocs_ethiquesoins_milewski_dignitedansloubli.php>. Page consultée le 12 novembre 2012.

¹¹⁴ *Traité Berakhot 8b, Talmud de Babylone*, cité dans Jacky MILEWSKI, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁵ *Lekhabdo* dérive, en hébreu, du terme *kavod*

Failing memory is compared to the broken Tablets of the Law [...] For all that, although broken, (the Tablets) has lost neither their worth nor their position. They are placed within the Holy Ark, next to the intact Tablets, and indeed, they are venerated and treated with honour. Continuing to insure the dignity of the person who has lost his memory and not considering him as worthless because he is no longer a bearer in any conscious fashion of a portion of his personal or family history, is demanded by the Talmudic masters. His failing memory does not take away from his intrinsic humanity. Showing him consideration is an obvious way of keeping him within the framework of society.¹¹⁶

This position is valid for the subject who has lost his or her memory or who “has lost his way in memory” and is equally so for any situation of extreme dependence in which *kavod* (honour or dignity) must signify not only dignity, but also human warmth and respect for the inherent worth of the person. “Lionel Naccache¹¹⁷ nicely explains that, if one considers that it is the soul, not the mind, that represents, in the final analysis, the identifying mark of what is human, then the contingencies of mental illness do not in any way lessen the inalienable humanity of the person. That person retains, through his or her life, his or her worth whatever the state of his or her intelligence, mental acuity or memory”¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶ Jacky MILEWSKI, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁷ Lionel NACCACHE. *Quatre exercices de pensée juive pour cerveaux réfléchis, Le judaïsme à la lumière des neurosciences*, Paris, Edition In Press, 2003, p. 156.

¹¹⁸ Jacky MILEWSKI, *op. cit.*

CHAPTER 12

WHY OLD AGE?

THE ULTIMATE ETHICAL OBJECTIVE

The question is at the once widespread and dramatic: *Why old age?* A moral vision of age, an ethics of relating to old age, and a code of behaviour toward those who experience the vicissitudes of advanced old age constitute but a first range of answers.

The familiar image of the hoary head requires one to rise out of respect for the elderly is one of those signs of old age that, according to commentators, Abraham specifically requested from God as a blessing. Why would one pray for the outer signs of old age¹¹⁹, since, according to tradition, no one up to that point exhibited any of them before death came without warning? Abraham's intention was to allow each person to distinguish "the father from the son," that is, the one who must be shown additional respect on account of his age. The prayer of Abraham, who asks for Divine assistance – practical assistance, a sort of code, in today's terms– has a noble purpose. It derives from the patriarch's kindness toward his fellow man, a foundational kindness in that it acts to civilize human relationships, and by that token, exemplary. "Anyone who takes on obligations toward others is a descendent of Abraham," writes Levinas¹²⁰. Hence, Jewish

¹¹⁹ Ou, selon certains exégètes, « les maux » de la vieillesse. Ou, selon certains exégètes, « les maux » de la vieillesse.

¹²⁰ Emmanuel LÉVINAS. *Du sacré au saint. Cinq nouvelles lectures talmudiques*, Paris, Éd. Minuit, 1977, p. 20.

tradition deems that showing respect toward the elderly to be also a form of goodness, which improves both society and collective life.

Also present in the way Jewish tradition views old age is the idea, elaborated in the Greco-Latin thought, that advanced old age represents a moment of intellectual and moral deepening¹²¹. With the proviso that the latter tradition considers age to be in itself a period of retreat and a time during which the physical world begins to lose its prominence. At the same time, he experiences a heightened awareness of the potential of more profound thought, introspection and spiritual growth, all of which are joined together by the term “wisdom.”

Old age in Judaism is the time that wisdom becomes an obligation, a wisdom sustained by the concern for transmitting, repairing, perfecting the world, and contributing to the moral redress and completion of the world, i.e., through *Tikkun*, through acts according to the commandments of the Torah. Therein lies its distinctive character. The idea of old age as a time of assessing one’s life, a notion which appears in literary accounts as well as in psychoanalysis, is approached from the perspective and with the intent of this *repairing* (the world). This means a turning back to the self which, at the

¹²¹ PLATON (1950). Œuvres complètes. Traduction Léon Robin et M. Joseph. Moreau, Vol. 1, La République et Vol. 2. Les Lois. Paris, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade.

CICÉRON ((Marcus Tullius Cicero), *De Senectute*. Traduction de Vincent Ravasse. Numérisé. Site : http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques_des_sciences_sociales/index.html

Senèque *De la brièveté de la vie*. Numérisé. Site : <http://bcs.fltr.ucl.ac.be/sen/bv.html>

approach of the end of life, leads to one or more actions that change in a significant manner the direction of the course of human relations and what remains of one's own life. Kohelet's call for happiness in the path traced by Abel constitutes a form of this outcome that has most especially marked the ages.

The ultimate ethical objective of old age calls then for an appropriate behaviour that consists of practical virtues. Of these, rising before one's elders remains the most present in the modern collective consciousness. There are others that cast a light on the other facets of this finality. They are embodied in Jacob's prayer to be allowed to live differently and in a distinct physical condition and experience of time before death. The Bible refers to this condition for the first time and calls it "sickness" or "illness": "*And it happened after these things that someone said to Joseph, "Look your father is ill." And he left, taking his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.*"¹²²

Indeed, according to tradition, since the creation, "no one had been stricken with a sickness before his death. [...] But Jacob pleaded with the Lord saying: 'Master of the Universe! Do not take back my soul until I have had the time to dictate my final wishes to my children and to repent.' The Lord heard his prayer and struck him with a sickness several days before his death."¹²³

Thus, Jacob is the first person to be "sick" in the Bible. According to the exegetes, his sickness is the frailness of old people. And someone told

¹²² Le père de Joseph étant Jacob (*Pentateuque, Genèse 48, 1*).

¹²³ Dans *La Voix de la Torah, op. cit.* p. 488.

Jacob and said, “Look your son Joseph is coming to you.” And Israel¹²⁴ summoned his strength and sat up in bed. (Genesis 48:2) The weakness of old age has been granted to mankind for reasons both moral and practical. “Jacob asked God for outward signs of old age in order for a man and those around him might prepare for the fatal moment.”¹²⁵

Why old age? In the same way that the white hair requested by Abraham to enable respect to be expressed to whoever merited it by reason of his age, the weakening of the body is requested by Jacob so that, when one becomes aware of the approach of death, every person may have the time to fulfil his duties of transmitting and repairing, and thus to insure peace between generations and between his children. Jacob’s prayer, which builds on Abraham’s, thus extends the field of the finality of old age. It is rooted in Jacob’s particular ability to join together and balance strength and kindness.

As for Isaac, Abraham’s son and Jacob’s father, his concern in old age is righteousness. In response to this concern, in his old age he is stricken with the sufferings of sickness. Thus, the alarm is forcefully sounded to the body, the most immediate seat of pain, in time for everyone to resolve personal, practical and spiritual dilemmas, as well as family issues that otherwise might survive his passing.

¹²⁴ Jacob voit son nom changé en celui d’Israël, après sa lutte avec l’ange (*Pentateuque, Genèse 32, 29*).

¹²⁵ Dans Akadem.org. <<http://www.akadem.org/medias/documents/malade-biblique-Doc1.pdf>>. Page consultée le 14 octobre 2012.

White hair, the weakness of old age, physical pain: the signs and distresses the sources of which are found in the desire of the patriarchs to allow each human being to achieve a particular form of ethical behaviour: showing respect to the old, giving time to filial piety to prepare itself for mourning for a loved one, repairing bonds and healing situations with the objective of transmitting and bringing peace to one's surroundings. In this manner, each patriarch contributed, based on his own fundamental qualities, to asserting a vision of a world made more moral through an active old age. Thus, Jewish tradition confers to old age a multidimensional finality which falls within a two-fold perspective. The first is subjective and immediate: the urgent need to go back to oneself and into oneself, introspection and ethical expansion, moral assessment and repairing. The second is intergenerational since it is concerned with conflict resolution and the transmission of a heritage which is both concrete and moral and spiritual to the generations to come.

CHAPTER 13

THE PATH FROM THE NAME AS LEGACY TO BREAKING OUT TO ACCOMPLISHMENT

In Jewish tradition, a person's name is first experienced as a legacy, then as a 'breaking away,' before it is realized as an accomplishment

The Biblical elders – at once great and flawed, heads of family who are part and parcel of the life of the group and emblematic of its history, who are committed to the task of ensuring its continuity are, each one of them, referred to by his or her own name, a name which speaks of the one who bears it and conveys his individual destiny. A name, the telling of a story of a particular life and a unique destiny: These are the three characteristics that these elders, men and women, remain familiar to us. It is also in these three ways that they illuminate other facets of the biblical vision of old age.

It is also in these three respects that they shed light on other facets of the Biblical vision of old age. For these names evoke individuals whose personal stories are narrated as bearing universal resonance, and indeed, this is why we continue to remember them for this dual reason: their singular exemplarity and their universal significance. Each of them was able both to embrace their name and to transcend it through self-transformation and a unique personal achievement. Finally, each of them offers an example and becomes emblematic of a journey that contributes in a singular way to the overall meaning of the destiny of mankind.

Each of these great Biblical elders possesses a name of exceptional historical significance for the history of the Jewish people. At the same time, they share the very same connection with the names of every Jew, of the past and today. This connection is rooted in the Jewish vision of the creation of the universe and the teaching according to which “creation is the act through which God has brought the universe into existence by the Word.”¹²⁶ “God said: “Let there be light.” And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And it was evening and it was morning, first day.” (Genesis 1 :3-5)

The world was created by foundational and creative words which name, distinguish and thereby place creation in the order of separation¹²⁷. By the word, the act of naming creates and separates. Biblical Hebrew itself conveys the equivalence between the word as spoken (*dibber = he has spoken*), the act of speaking (*ledabber= to speak*) and the thing (*davar*). This equivalence operates then between naming and the essence of what is named. The act of

¹²⁶ David BANON (2012), *Béréchit : La double dimension de l'humain*. Voir site : http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5773/paracha/berechit-la-double-dimension-de-l-humain-12-09-2012-46332_4449.php. Page consultée le 18 novembre 2012.

¹²⁷ « Séparer se dit, en hébreu, *lehavdil*, dont la racine *b.l.d.* désigne l'action divine de séparation. Cette racine apparaît explicitement cinq fois dans la *Genèse* en 1, 4; 1, 6; 1, 7; 1, 14 et 1, 18. L'idée de séparation – et donc de celle de l'identité propre à la chose ou au sujet nommés – apparaît d'autre part 10 fois, par exemple, sous la forme « selon leur espèce », [comme, par exemple, dans le verset : « Dieu dit : "Que la terre produise des végétaux, savoir : des herbes renfermant une semence; des arbres fruitiers portant, selon leur espèce, un fruit qui perpétue sa semence sur la terre." Et cela s'accomplit » (*Pentateuque, Genèse 1, 11*). David BANON, *op. cit.*

naming, in and of itself, not only attempts to capture and render this essence, but it also separates and distinguishes the thing that is named from the other things that compose the universe.

While God created the universe *ex nihilo* only once, the birth of a child is par excellence the creative act in the human mode. In the same manner in which God proceeded by making distinctions and separations, the act of naming when it concerns individuals is inspired and distinguishes a subject from all others which surround him. This same act of naming situates a child in the history of a family and a narrative¹²⁸. To get as close as possible to this ideal of the adequacy between the name and the very essence of the person, a circumstance of birth, a place, a quality, a mission, a hope or a parental desire are invoked.

The source of the name may vary, but this source immediately establishes itself as an identity anchor that separates and distinguishes the subject from other individuals and, at the same time, constitutes a legacy, life project or even as a destiny. “*Nomen est omen,*” and in case of ill omen, the name must be changed or re-interpreted. For the name is liable to have different meanings given to

¹²⁸ Par nom est entendu ici ce que nous appelons couramment « prénom ». Les documents hébraïques font suivre le nom de la personne par la mention « fils de » ou « fille de » suivie du nom (prénom) du père. Selon un usage moins ancien, mais devenu coutumier dans bien des milieux, cette mention est suivie du nom de la mère. Les noms de famille des Juifs sont soit d'origine biblique et liés à des fonctions sacerdotales (tels Lévy, ou Cohen), soit dérivent de prénoms. Ils peuvent également avoir des origines profanes diverses. Dans ces derniers cas, ces noms sont forgés selon les mêmes modèles qui président à la construction des noms de famille non-juifs de ces sociétés. Voir Marc-Alain OUAKNIN, Dory ROTNEMER. *Le livre des prénoms bibliques et hébraïques*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1997, p. 280-281.

it by others, its original meaning may then change to the detriment of the name's bearer and since the future is open and uncertain, it may eventually become dangerous to bear.¹²⁹

The number of names given to a person or an entity corresponds to his, her or its importance. If God has seventy-two names and Jerusalem, seventy, Moses, according to certain sources, was allotted twelve names, all significant, so important were his deeds. Each one of these revealed one of the various facets of his person¹³⁰. The name by which he remains the most familiar takes us back to the circumstances of his being saved: *And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became a son to her, and she called his name Moses, and said: "For from the water I drew him out."*¹³¹ Moses, in his turn, having taken refuge in the province of Midian, near the Sinai desert, gives his first-born the name Gershon, the literal meaning of which is "stranger there,"¹³² a reference to the multiple facets of Moses' experience of being in exile. Uprooted from his home and family at birth, pulled out of the water, raised as a

¹²⁹ Yaïr ZAKOVITCH (2009). « Changer de destinée dans le monde de la Bible », dans *Leur nom, ils l'ont changé (4/7) : La force du nom*. Voir site : <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/la-force-du-nom/la-force-du-nom-02-03-2010-8046_4153.php>. Page consultée le 22 novembre 2012.

¹³⁰ Avigdor SHINAN. « Comment s'appelait Moïse avant de s'appeler Moshé? », dans *Leur nom, ils l'ont changé (4/7) : La force du nom*.

¹³¹ *Pentateuque, Exode 2, 10*. Commentaire de RACHI : Je l'ai tiré (*mechithihou*) depuis les eaux [*min hayam*] Traduction [...] en araméen : *che'halté*, qui veut dire : "retirer" [...] Le mot hébreu *mechithihou* veut dire également : "enlever", "écarter" [...] A mon avis toutefois, ce mot [appartient] au radical *macha* qui signifie : "faire sortir". Par ailleurs, le Talmud insiste beaucoup sur la polynomie de Moïse. Voir Marc-Alain OUAKNIN, Dory ROTNEMER, *op. cit.* p. 30-41.

¹³² De l'hébreu *guer*, étranger et *cham*, qui signifie là-bas.

hidden child – the first hidden child in Jewish history¹³³ – in Pharaoh’s palace, forced to flee from Egypt, a refugee in a foreign land, Moses closely associates his new experience of fatherhood with the experience of an immigrant, which carries on into his son’s existence.

Esau’s name comes from the fact that he bears on his body one of the signs reserved for maturity: *And the first one came out ruddy, like a hairy mantle all over, and they called his name Esau.* (Genesis 25 : 25) “He was named *Esau*, from the root “asseh” (to make). Everyone called him that because he was “made,” i.e., he had come into the world hairy all over, like a man of mature years.”¹³⁴

His brother Jacob came, according to tradition, literally on Esau’s heels. “*Then his brother came out, his had grasping Esau’s heel, and they called his name Jacob*” (Genesis 25: 26) Another explanation: “It was his father who called him that because he had been holding Esau’s heel (‘aqev”)¹³⁵. As the Biblical narrative will go on to show, this occurs on two occasions: when Jacob appropriates for himself Esau’s birthright, and when he resorts to subterfuge to obtain the blessing that his father Isaac had meant for Esau, the significance of his position of younger brother who remains as close as possible to the first born in a rivalry that begins in their mother Rebecca’s womb.

Just as literally, Jacob’s father, Isaac, “the man who will laugh,” also

¹³³ Delphine HORVILLEUR (2011) *Qui était Moïse?* Voir site : <http://www.akadem.org/pour-commencer/les-personnages-bibliques/qui-etait-moise-14-09-2011-26979_4336.php>. Page consultée le 22 novembre 2012.

¹³⁴ Commentaire de RACHI de *Pentateuque, Genèse 25, 25.*

¹³⁵ Commentaire de RACHI de *Pentateuque, Genèse 25, 26.*

bears a name connected to the circumstances of his birth, namely the burst of laughter (*tse'hoq*) which the Divine announcement provokes for her: *And Abraham flung himself on his face, and he laughed, saying to himself: "To a hundred year old will a child be born,/ will ninety-year old Sarah give birth?"* (Genesis 17:17) Then, Sarah hears this announcement: *And Sarah laughed inwardly, saying: "After being shriveled, shall I have pleasure, and my husband is old?"* (Genesis 18 :12) Isaac's story, caught between his father's and his mother's laughter, will be turned in a new direction by the laughter of his brother Ishmael, borne to his mother's servant Hagar – was he laughing at him or with him? – which Sarah will witness, and which will lead her to demand that Ishmael and his mother Hagar leave. Some commentators regard this name that was dictated by God himself a designation that Isaac "will laugh in the time of the Messiah," while others establish a correspondence between the laughter connected with his name and the sexual pleasure experienced by his mother Sarah in her relationship with his father Abraham. And finally, some commentators see a correspondence between the name Isaac and the laughter of his own sexual relationship with his wife Rebecca, with whom he forms the first "romantic couple" in the Bible¹³⁶.

The name embodies the true birth certificate for the characters in the

¹³⁶ Marc-Alain OUAKNIN, Dory ROTNEMER, *op. cit.* p. 76. Pour le développement de ces commentaires voir Francine KAUFMANN (2009). *Les épisodes de nomination dans la Bible et les sources juives*. Voir site : http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/la-force-du-nom/la-force-du-nom-07-04-2010-8090_4153.php.

Bible, just as it continues to play this role in regard to children within Jewish communities. This is a role based on language since the literal meaning of the Hebrew term for child, “*yeled*,” is “being born.”¹³⁷ Contrary, for example, to the Latin term “*infans*,” which designates a very young person not yet able to speak, Hebrew emphasizes the transformative dynamic of change and maturation, a dynamic of which the specific character consists of conflict.¹³⁸ Between submitting to the parental obligation conveyed by the name given and rejection of it or accepting it as one’s heritage, between self-assertion in regard to oneself and the obligation of transmitting a good name to the generations to come, in Judaism a name represents in itself a mission to be fulfilled.

The name is a responsibility. Nevertheless, it remains open-ended, a work to be brought to fruition, and at the same time potentially inadequate and conflictual. And history has shown that the concern for perpetuating the Jewish people has made the Jewish name a collective issue from the period of the Hebrew people to our own day. It is said that what the Hebrews did not change during the centuries of their exile in Egypt was their name. This is one of the choices that allowed them to preserve their identity as a people. “The people of Israel did not change their names in Egypt; they went in as

¹³⁷ *Yeled* signifie à la fois enfant et porter des enfants tandis que *yalád* signifie donner naissance à un enfant.

¹³⁸ Abram COEN (2009). *Un nom pour la vie*. Voir site : http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/la-force-du-nom/la-force-du-nom-02-03-2010-8046_4153.php

Reuben and Simon and as Reuben and Simon, they went out.”¹³⁹

The names of the Biblical elders are emblematic since they mark them as individuals who, despite their particular shortcomings, were able to fully accomplish what Jewish tradition considers it everyone's due to realize: acceptance, even at the cost of undergoing crises and rebellion, and a sublimation through begetting (i.e., fruition) of the injunction conveyed in the name¹⁴⁰, an injunction that their parents obeyed and which had been transmitted to them as such. This is an injunction which amounts to an obligation for each one to make of his or her name in his or her turn a unique legacy. The strength of the name then reveals itself during the journey toward oneself. The old man or woman, who is still with us on account of his or her name, has attended, in an exceptionally accomplished manner, to the name's meaningfulness in three ways emphasized by tradition.

The first is the official name toward which he is obligated to direct himself. It is in itself the same time is a legacy which comes from the injunction to realize the significance of the name one has received from one's parents. The second is the name as the reputation by which he is known to others, the name of social connection and integration to the life of the group, the name which emphasizes the

¹³⁹ Geoffrey WIGODER (sous la direction de), *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du judaïsme*, 1996, p. 739 et Chemot Rabba 1 : 28.

¹⁴⁰ Alain DIDIER-WEILL (2009). *L'injonction nominative*. Colloque international : *La force du nom*. Voir site : http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/themes/philosophie/2/11/module_7825.php?chapitre_courant=5. Page consultée le 1^{er} juillet 2011.

importance that Jewish tradition accords “a good name,” meaning a good reputation: *Better a good name than good oil, and the day of death than the day one is born.* (Ecclesiastes 7 :1) And so it is that Jewish communities still recall the great elders of their history: Moses, like Joseph, was modest¹⁴¹. Moses, having taken refuge in the desert of Midian, was a shepherd gently leading his flock, just like Jacob. King Solomon was wise. Job was faithful to God. Joseph transcended his brothers’ persecution and forgave them. Abraham is kind, generous and hospitable. Noah was righteous. This is equally true for other characters for whom the Hebrew Bible gives no age, such as Hanna, the last barren woman of Biblical history¹⁴², who embodies the scope and significance of prayer.

The third locates the name in the dynamic of transmission and passage. It indicates the specific nature of the existential motif of the one who bears this name-legacy as open- ended and which nevertheless covers what each one has accomplished and transmitted on the moral and human order. This is the name of the accomplishments that one leaves behind and which do not pertain to the material universe. Of these three names, the one that establishes the old person’s legacy is the most important since it is at the same time borne by his heritage and yet also a product of his choices. It was his responsibility to bear but also his own work and the object of

¹⁴¹ Bien des textes de la littérature biblique les désignent de cette façon : « Moïse le modeste », « Joseph le modeste ».

¹⁴² La stérilité féminine est l’un des thèmes récurrents de la Bible. Trois des quatre matriarches, Sara, Rébecca et Rachel, sont longtemps stériles avant de donner naissance à des enfants; la seule matriarche qui vivra une union féconde dès son mariage avec Jacob étant Leah.

his mission.

Even unto them will I give in My house and within My walls a monument and a memorial better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting memorial, that shall not be cut off. (Isaiah 56: 5)

To our day, Jewish tradition accords a great value to each person's name in the collective memory beyond death. Significantly, to cite but one example, by dedicating a copy of the Pentateuch, it foresees various ways to insure the survival of the memory of a person who dies without heir. Written with this purpose in mind, the Book (*Sefer Torah*), serves as a memorial according to Biblical tradition. *And Absalom had taken and heaped up a cairn for himself in his lifetime, which is in the Valley of the King, for he said, "I have no son to make my name remembered." And he called the cairn after his name, and it is called Absalom's Monument to this day. (2 Samuel 18: 18)*

In the same line, it is not only the survival of the name, but also its positive recollection, that are part of the enduring strength of names, still so precious to Jewish tradition. Anti-Semitism and Judeophobia have well grasped this point through their hatred of the Jewish name and deliberate threatening of Jewish names. Conversely, changing one's name to escape anti-Jewish persecution still provokes strong, often conflicting, feelings among individuals and families. The Jewish name, whether hidden or asserted despite a history of persecution in

the Diaspora, Conversely, changing one's name to escape anti-

Jewish persecution still provokes strong, often conflicting, feelings among individuals and families. The Jewish name, whether hidden or asserted despite a history of persecution in the diaspora, remains present among the ancient and current sufferings of the Jewish identity.

Jewish tradition invokes the names of people in history who embody evil and absolute immorality by adding a phrase that calls for their name to be erased from the memory of mankind¹⁴³ illustrates, among other examples, the importance of the personal name recalled as a blessing¹⁴⁴. This name, which “shall not perish,” “is more precious than sons or daughters”: the promise and assertion are noteworthy coming from a culture which otherwise accords so much importance to family life and descendants. “Numerous descendants” is the mark of divine blessing, a bliss that signals one of the forms of an accomplished life and which guarantees the survival of one’s name in the memory of the family and the group.

Conversely, as a response to the Nazi obsession with erasing individuality and imposing anonymity as a foundation for the genocide of the Jewish people and to cut off forever the succession of generations, the Shoah Memorial in Jerusalem, has confirmed the

¹⁴³ L’usage de l’expression « *imah chemo* », donnée ici en hébreu dans son usage au masculin, signifie littéralement : « que son nom soit effacé ». Elle reste utilisée dans des situations particulièrement graves.

¹⁴⁴ La coutume au sein des communautés juives est de faire suivre le nom d’êtres proches décédés, parents ou maîtres, de la mention « *zikhrono le brakha* » donnée ici en hébreu dans son usage au masculin signifiant « de souvenir béni » ou « que son souvenir soit source de bénédictions ».

enduring existence of each person's name which is at the same time a recollection of the collective existence of the Jewish people. The name of the memorial is *Yad Vashem*, or literally "a house (a monument) and a name." Confronted with the intolerable threat of names' being wiped out, in open resistance to the murder of names and their being reduced to the abstraction conveyed by the expression "the Jew," Yad Vashem re-establishes the "extreme of singularity"¹⁴⁵ represented by the name of each victim who had been unnamed in multiple ways¹⁴⁶, first of all, by tattooing an identification number on the arm of each one by the Nazis.

Names are liable to perish. Jewish tradition, faithful to the foundational idea that names are inspired and creative, of the subject and of his lifelong identity-journey forward, has established that it is morally imperative to resist the threat of its loss¹⁴⁷. This is what, among other accomplishments, what a sequence of Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985) accomplishes when the director asks one of the neighbors of some of the Polish victims of the Shoah to read out their names before focusing his camera on a series of suitcases marked in white with the names of several deportees, from

¹⁴⁵ Eric MARTY (2009) *Et je leur donnerai un nom impérissable : Shoah de Claude Lanzman*. Colloque international : La force du nom. Voir site : http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/themes/philosophie/2/11/module_7874.php. Page consultée le 1^{er} juillet 2011.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ La place du souvenir (*zakhor*) joue un rôle important dans l'histoire juive, avant même la constitution de la religion juive, et le judaïsme continue à être aussi une mémoire collective. D'où l'importance pour les communautés juives et le judaïsme contemporains de faire survivre en particulier, mais pas uniquement, les victimes de la Shoah dans le souvenir collectif.

Marie Kafka to Hermann Pasternak¹⁴⁸.

The name is a personal locus in the chain of generations, remembering and transmission of legacy. It is memory. It is around the absence of memory and the fading away of a person's name after his passing that death and hence total annihilation truly takes shape in Biblical literature: *There is no remembrance of the first things nor of the last things that will be. They will have no remembrance with those who will be in the latter time. (Ecclesiastes 1:11) For in mere breath did it come, and into darkness it goes, and in darkness its name is covered;* (Ecclesiastes 6 :4) This annihilation is the retribution *par excellence* which awaits those who bear and perform acts of immorality: *His remembrance is lost from the earth, no name has he abroad. (Job 18:17) Nor son nor grandson in his kinfolk, and no remnant where he sojourned. (Job 18: 19)* Thus, comes to life the notion of descendants bearing life-affirming continuity of each person through the positive recollection of his or her name beyond the grave.

And the Lord said to Moses: "Write this down as a remembrance in a record, and put it in Joshua's hearing, that I will surely wipe out the name of Amalek from under the heavens."¹⁴⁹ You shall wipe out the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ *Pentateuque, Exode 17, 14.* L'épisode d'Amalec voit ce dernier attaquer Israël à Refidim, dans le désert du Sinaï. Moïse ordonne à Josué de le combattre. Josué exécuta ce que lui avait dit Moïse, en livrant bataille et triompha d'Amalec et de son peuple (*Pentateuque, Exode 17, 8-13*). Commentaire de RACHI : « Écris ceci pour mémorial. Que 'Amaleq a été le premier de tous les peuples à attaquer Israël (Mekhilta). Et mets aux oreilles de Yehochou'a Celui qui fera entrer Israël dans sa terre, afin qu'il ordonne à Israël de lui régler son dû. On trouve ici une allusion faite à Mochè que c'est Yehochou'a qui fera entrer Israël en Terre sainte (Mekhilta). Qu'effacer, j'effacerai. C'est pour cette raison-ci que je te l'ordonne : Je veux l'effacer. » Amalec est présenté, selon les interprétations, comme un homme, ennemi d'Israël, mais aussi comme une tribu violente et malfaisante ou comme un simple clan de pillards. Il est Perla Serfaty-Garzon ©. Meaning and Fruitfulness in Late Life. Longevity in the Jewish Tradition. 111

remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens, you shall not forget. (Deuteronomy 25: 19) The duty to eliminate the very memory of evil and the duty not to forget it. Remember the cost of the death drive¹⁵⁰. Wipe it out and do not forget having wiped it out. Within the inner contradiction that lies in this two-fold injunction is Amalek, as ultimate symbolic embodiment of evil, a metaphorical entity whose sources within oneself and in the world must be combated¹⁵¹. A battle of the subject – of each subject – who wipes everything out even while pursuing his combat unceasingly, thus taking his place in the impossible task of forgetting evil from which nothing good can come.¹⁵² This evil is ontological even as it may be embodied by a person or a people.¹⁵³

The elders of the Bible bear their names in the first place as a destiny: Moses, exile and immigrant, remains a passer and never experiences the settlement in the Promised Land. Jacob's

resté, dans la psyché collective du peuple juif, comme le symbole de l'ennemi qui veut détruire Israël sans aucune pitié pour aucun de ses membres, mû par une haine viscérale.

¹⁵⁰ L'interdit de cet oubli figure parmi les 613 devoirs religieux commandés par la Torah. Voir Yeshaya DALSACE (2010) *Exterminer Amalek*, site : http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5770/haftarat-hachavoua-5770/exterminer-amalek-tetsave-15-02-2010-8027_4315.php. Page consultée le 22 novembre 2012.

¹⁵¹ *Zohar* 3. 281 cité dans Yeshaya DALSACE (2010) *Exterminer Amalek*, op.cit. Le *Zohar*, ouvrage médiéval d'exégèse ésotérique et mystique de la Torah, et l'un des livres majeurs de la Kabbale, voit en Amalec non un peuple ni un homme, mais le versant obscur de l'humain qui se traduit par la magie, le mauvais désir, l'iniquité et l'injustice

¹⁵² Élie WIESEL (2008). *Lire, étudier après la Catastrophe. La force d'un survivant*, site : http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/lire-etudier-apres-la-catastrophe/la-force-d-un-survivant-12-01-2010-7978_4212.php.

¹⁵³ Pour la lecture de l'injonction divine d'extermination d'Amalec (*Prophètes, 1 Samuel* 15, 18) fondée sur le *Zohar*, voir Yeshaya DALSACE (2010) *op. cit.*

“impatience” to come out of his mother’s womb leads to his appropriating the status of first-born which will be the basis of his role as patriarch. However, their names, like the name of any person, remain open. When the patriarch or matriarch undergoes a trial or experience a shift in identity, this openness is expressed by a change of name¹⁵⁴.

“And Abram was ninety-nine years old, and the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him: “I am El Shaddai. Walk in my presence and be blameless, and I will grant My covenant between Me and you and I will multiply you greatly.” And Abram flung himself on his face, and God spoke to him, saying, “As for Me, this is My covenant with you, you shall be a father to a multitude of nations.

And no longer shall your name be called Abram but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you father to a multitude of nations¹⁵⁵”.

And God said to Abraham: “Sarai your wife shall no longer call her name Sarai, for Sarah is her name.” And I will bless her and

¹⁵⁴ Nous nous en tenons à quelques cas de changements de noms pertinents pour notre sujet, mais les exemples de changements de noms sont nombreux dans la littérature biblique. Voir, par exemple, l'article *Shinnuy ha-shem* (changement de nom) : « *Solomon was called by Nathan "Jedidiah" (God's beloved) "because of the Lord" (II Sam. xii. 25). Pharaoh-nechoh appointed Eliakim king of Jerusalem and changed his name to "Jehoiakim" (= "the Lord's confirmed"; II Kings xxiii. 34); the King of Babylon made Mattaniah king of Jerusalem and called him "Zedekiah" (= "the Lord's right man"; ib. xxiv. 17); and the names of Daniel and his comrades were changed to Chaldaic ones (Dan. i. 7). Isaiah predicted that Jerusalem would be called by a new name, "Hephzi-bah" (= "My delight is in her"; Isa. lxii. 4).* » Site : <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13583-shinnuy-ha-shem#>>.

¹⁵⁵ *Pentateuque, Genèse 17, 1-5.* « Abram signifie « le Père élevé ». Abraham signifie le « Père de la Multitude ». Dans Marc-Alain OUAKNIN, Dory ROTNEMER, *op. cit.* p. 63.

Commentaire de RACHI de *Genèse, 17, 5* : « Je t'ai établi père d'une multitude de nations (*av hamon*). C'est un jeu de mots (*notariqon*). Ce sont les syllabes mêmes qui forment le nom d'Avraham : *av hamon*. La lettre *reich* [r] qui se trouvait dans le nom d'Avram signifie qu'il était seulement père de Aram (*Berakhoth* 13a), son pays natal. Maintenant, il devient le père de toute l'humanité. Ce *reich* est resté à sa place. »

I will also give you from her a son and I will bless him, and she shall become nations, kings of peoples shall issue from her¹⁵⁶.”

“And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. And he saw that he had won out against him and he touched his hip-socket and Jacob’s hip-socket was wrenched as he wrestled with him. And he said, “Let me go, for dawn is breaking.” And he said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” And he said, “Not Jacob shall be your name hence, but Israel, for you have strived with God and men, and won out.¹⁵⁷”

From Hosea (Hoshea) to Joshua: Moses changes the name of his second-in-command¹⁵⁸ when he sends him to explore the Land of Canaan along with eleven other scouts, all eminent representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel in order, according to tradition, to make the Promised Land precious to the Hebrew people¹⁵⁹. *These are the names of the men whom Moses sent out to scout out the land. And Moses called Hosea the son of Nun Joshua¹⁶⁰.* “Moshe called

¹⁵⁶ *Pentateuque, Genèse 17, 15-16.* Commentaire de RACHI de *Genèse, 17, 15* : « Tu n’appelleras plus son nom Saraï. Mot qui signifie : « “ma” princesse », pour moi mais pas pour les autres, tandis que « Sara » tout court signifie « princesse », pour tous (*Berakhoth 13a*). »

¹⁵⁷ *Pentateuque, Genèse 32, 25-29.* Commentaire de RACHI de *Genèse 32, 29* : « Ya’aqov ne sera plus. On ne pourra plus soutenir que c’est par ruse et par éviction (*iqva* – même racine que *Ya’aqov*) que tu as obtenu les bénédictions, mais en toute dignité et ouvertement. »

¹⁵⁸ Le prophète Josué – en hébreu *Yehoshua*, signifiant « Dieu est le salut » –, possédait également les qualités de juge et de chef militaire et a conduit Israël lors de la conquête de Canaan. Son nom reste associé à la conquête de Jéricho. Josué mourut à cent dix ans. Le nom de Josué est important dans la tradition chrétienne. Dans sa transcription du grec, dont les implications théologiques seront fondamentales, ce nom devient Jésus.

¹⁵⁹ Seuls Josué et Caleb reviendront avec des descriptions élogieuses de la Terre promise, tandis que les dix autres explorateurs en rapporteront des récits calomnieux.

¹⁶⁰ *Pentateuque, Nombres 13, 16.* Moïse a changé le nom de *Hoshéa Bin Noun* en *Yehoshoua Bin Noun* par l’ajout d’un *Youd [i]* Le sens du nom en est modifié, mais la racine reste la même : le sauveur.

Hoshea son of Nun... He prayed for him: May Hashem save you (qa yoshi'akha) from the plotting of the scouts!" (Sota 34b)¹⁶¹. Modifying Joshua's name symbolizes both his increased role in Moses' entourage, and the dangerous character of his exploration. Indeed, it symbolizes Joshua's destiny, as his people's savior, which will indeed be to combat and defeat Amalek.

Modifying a name inaugurates, then confirms, the pathway toward the name along several modes. The first of these modes refers to the metamorphosis of the subject's body: Abraham submits to the Pact of the Covenant by being circumcised¹⁶²; Sarah bears a child; Jacob's hip is dislocated. Jacob will continue to limp to emphasize that "man cannot go straight forward within a ready-made and predetermined narrative: the pathways have not been marked out; life is a struggle and an adventure."¹⁶³

Three pivotal moments in three individual histories, three name changes, and three identity reconstructions are indelibly marked by three metamorphoses of the body. This congruence between two transformations reflects that which exists, according to Jewish thought, between body and soul, the material and spiritual realms, doing and thinking. Contrary to Western thought which sets up a

¹⁶¹ Commentaire de RACHI de *Pentateuque, Nombres* 13, 16.

¹⁶² « Voici le pacte que vous observerez, qui est entre moi et vous, jusqu'à ta dernière postérité : circoncire tout mâle d'entre vous » (*Pentateuque, Genèse* ch. 17, 10).

¹⁶³ Marc-Alain OUAKNIN, Dory ROTNEMER, *op. cit.* p. 79.

dichotomy between body and soul, Judaism considers the body to possess its own intellect, a “natural reason,” its own soul which manifests itself as a life of longing for transformation and moving toward the life of the spirit¹⁶⁴.

The second mode lies within name and bodily changes, *i.e.*, the intentional tension toward a self that repairs the past and conquers the present, a tearing out of which Jacob represents one of the emblematic cases. Tradition relates that Jacob was a studious man, who combined goodness and generosity with justice, both lucid and prudent. Yet, before he was called Israel, he acted with cunning and went forward masked and once he had achieved his goal, was forced to go into exile. One side of his character recalls the horizontality and the character of the serpent who was cursed by God. But with the ladder, Jacob encounters the verticality of man who stands erect to raise himself upward to transcend what he has been up to this point. The dream is the moment at which Jacob’s story changes direction. His heel kept him attached to the ground¹⁶⁵. Now an organ of his body allows him to stand erect and to seize a second blessing, but this time with his face uncovered and with the full dignity of a prince and leader¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶⁴ Pour un développement de la relation corps-âme, voir Mordekhai CHRIQUI, (2009). *Cabale, corps et âme*, site : <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/themes/vie-juive/judaisme-au-quotidien/le-rapport-au-corps/table-ronde-cabale-corps-et-ame-22-10-2009-7915_315.php>.

¹⁶⁵ Bernard MARUANI, (2011) *Vayichla'h: la métamorphose de Jacob*, site : <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5772/paracha/vayichla-h-la-metamorphose-de-jacob-29-11-2011-27093_4330.php>.

¹⁶⁶ Jacob est nommé une seconde fois Israël dans la Genèse : « Dieu lui dit : "Tu te nommes Jacob; mais ton nom, désormais, ne sera plus Jacob, ton nom sera Israël"; il lui donna ainsi le nom d'Israël » Perla Serfaty-Garzon ©. *Meaning and Fruitfulness in Late Life. Longevity in the Jewish Tradition.* 116

Sarah the matriarch, the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, but also the prophet Joshua, move forward toward their new name. In this movement which is realized even while keeping the original meaning of their first name¹⁶⁷, the third mode lies in the universality of the mission, as of the experience of the great elders of the Bible.

Abraham becomes the “Father of a Multitude.” The change of Sarai’s name, “My Princess,” to Sarah, “Princess,” marks the transition from a familial role, limited to home and family and therefore somewhat “local” and private, to a universal mission. Sarai was a prophetess while Sarah is at once mother of a family, prophetess and matriarch. Jacob will be father of twelve sons who will give birth to the twelve tribes of Israel (Genesis 35:26) As for Joshua, he will achieve the conquest of Canaan.

From the life journeys of these exceptional old people, as from the writings of the Talmud¹⁶⁸, among Jewish communities, there has been preserved the practice to change names to honor a person’s achievements, to avert the angel of death – for example, following the death of children within a single family – and in the case of a serious illness¹⁶⁹. Thus, as in so many other ways, the stories of the Bible remain present in everyone’s life story bearing multiple meanings and

(*Pentateuque, Genèse 35, 10*). Commentaire de RACHI de *Genèse 35, 10* : « Ton nom ne sera plus appelé *Ya’aqov*. À ce nom, qui désigne quelqu’un aux aguets pour prendre autrui par surprise (*‘iqva*), se substituera Israël, qui signifie “prince” et “chef”. »

¹⁶⁷ Marc-Alain OUAKNIN, Dory ROTNEMER, *op. cit.* p. 35-39.

¹⁶⁸ *Talmud Roch Ha-Chanah* (R. H.) 16b, cité dans Geoffrey WIGODER (sous la direction de), *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du judaïsme*, p. 739.

¹⁶⁹ Article « Shinnuy ha-shem » (changement de nom), *ibid.*

universality.

CONCLUSION:
THERE IS NO RETIREMENT FROM THE *MITSVOT*

In the Hebrew Bible, as we have seen, there is no special status for old age, nor a particular concept of retirement. Aging considered as a dynamic process, old age as a condition with a given status or advanced old age as a source of societal issues in itself: these may be a topic of commandments, ethical reflections and numerous commentaries. Nonetheless, old age is not treated in Biblical literature in a systematic manner and does not constitute a central theme in it. This is basically the case because aging, old age and longevity are not singled out as distinct process or condition, but on the contrary are viewed as being an integral part of the life journey. These themes are treated and abundantly commented on in relation to the multiplicity of contexts of the primordial Biblical interest in all that is human: the human condition in general, human relationships, the relationship of mankind to the Divine Project. On this same account, these themes give rise to *mitzvoth* / commandments, as well as concrete obligations in regard to old age, commandments that constitute a moral code of age and of its ethical legacy.

Biblical literature does not speak of old age as a special age-specific status within society which would be clearly defined. The notion of

thresholds or milestones, supposed to notify an individual in a definitive manner that he has acceded to any special status as an old person within the group is completely foreign to the Bible. Jewish law specifies no particular category of obligation for the old. Although it does specify the age at which a boy is obliged to perform the *mitzvot* (*bar mitzvah* for boys at the age of thirteen and the more recent practice of *bat mitzvah* for girls at the age of twelve), there is no age limit to these obligations. There is no retirement from the *mitzvot* nor is there any notion that an old person is any less fit than anyone else to perform them.

Jewish sources neither formulate nor specify any particular societal status for old age. For a very long time, in fact up to the contemporary period, it has been moral imperatives with a more general scope, such as those regarding the obligations of everyone toward the indigent and people who are isolated, which have for example provided the basis for the creation of institutions to help and support the elderly. These same imperatives are still the impetus for old age homes in contemporary Jewish communities. Neither do Biblical sources allow one to respond clearly or definitively to the question: *At what age is one considered old?* They rather offer several perspectives that open up an interrogation on this topic. In these sources, old age does not in itself bear any particular relevance or story of its own.

From Personal Narratives of Aging to the Callings of Longevity

A unified vision of the experience of aging cannot be discerned throughout Biblical texts. This can be shown by the abundance and variety of the narratives and commentaries in the sources regarding the subjective and metaphysical meaning of advanced age. Jewish tradition conveys something entirely different, which must be grasped, not only from the number of moral injunctions which dictates the conduct of the group and of each individual toward the aged, but also from the equally strong formulation of the callings of longevity.

Traditional sources also cover, from multiple perspectives, the psychological and emotional states of the process of aging at the very moment at which one becomes aware of the proximity of death, as testified by the powerful poetry of Kohelet and Job . This multiplicity of approaches is true to the narrative option of the Bible, which begin with individuals as subjects and their personal narratives in order to relate the collective history of Israel and its shared destiny. Thus, the Biblical narratives allow one to examine the inner development of their characters, their private doubts and questionings and their own way of resolving the ethical questions which which they are confronted. These all constitute evidence of the difficulties of approaching and fulfilling the Divine moral project. Or, to adopt the terms and perspective of the original Biblical thought, as so many illustrations of the challenges in fulfilling the Messianic project

of the ethical advent of humankind. The same approach, focused on the subject and his inner movements, as applied to “old age” as an overall theme, gives rise then to an exploration of the paradoxical aspects of this stage of life. It brings to the treatment due old age the same approach of questions and debates that, in accordance with Jewish tradition, is applied to the examination and understanding, and more generally to the study of human and social phenomena

Moral Growth Over Time

The responses of the characters in Biblical literature to the experience of aging and longevity are as subjective, as diverse and as personal as those of the elderly of today. Biblical sources, like Western literature and poetry, as well as the social sciences, describe just as much the grandeur of old age to society as its potential for personal moral decline and painful physical vicissitudes.

However, the grandeur, just as much as the physical and moral suffering of the old men of the Bible, are meaningful in that they articulate and orient the collective history of Israel. These old men and women reach ages which are the stuff of legend and which constitute metaphysical categories, and this is but one of the meanings to establish longevity as an obligation for moral and spiritual growth, a wide window opening to potentialities and to transmission of legacy. Long life is a blessing, a life stage which must be made a positive accomplishment out of one’s duty toward oneself

and toward the collective journey through time. It carries an obligation for moral fruitfulness. Old age is viewed as noble. It bears a mission and responsibility. An integral part of daily life and of the immediate present, it must situate its own personal action on the temporal horizon of the collective future. It sets up major moral injunctions of respect for society, injunctions which are the signs of society's moral health, indeed whether it is civil or civilized. When suffering strikes, old age is a source of obligations of protection and practices of individual and collective support. From antiquity to contemporary Jewish communities, these obligations have maintained their vital place at the heart of the practices of mutual assistance in community life.

It is in these terms and with the main concern of engenderment, both ethical and historical, that Biblical literature maps out in its own way the parameters of old age. The Judeo-Christian West has inherited these basically ethical parameters, which it has maintained up to the present both inside and outside the Biblical concept of Revelation, as well as outside the more general theological framework of Jewish sources.

An element in this area is the Jewish vision of life as a value in and of itself, especially in its connection to its conception of time as a time for renewal and as an opening. A two-fold Biblical legacy which obliges the Jewish people to determine its own reckoning of time and

to reject the fatality of destiny¹⁷⁰. This same legacy which also situates the people on the horizon of the promise of a new land and a new destiny¹⁷¹. This same legacy that is thus operating to emphasize a specific relationship to time which is at the same time hope and “nostalgia for the future”¹⁷². In the Biblical perspective, the past must be known, interrogated and worked out – in the psychoanalytical sense of the term – to be made fruitful to generate the future.

*“Remember the days of old, give thought to the years of times past. Ask your father, that he may tell you, your elders, that they may to say to you.”*¹⁷³ The invitation is the equivalent of the question: “In the recollection of a story or of history and in the interrogation of the collective or individual past, what precisely can be reinvested in a positive manner for the sake of the individual or shared future?”

¹⁷⁰ À titre d’illustration de cet aspect de ce rapport au temps, la tradition établit que le premier devoir assigné au peuple juif affranchi de l’esclavage en Égypte fut de fixer lui-même les dates des fêtes religieuses et, ainsi, de décider du temps, cette maîtrise constituant l’une des manifestations fondamentales de la liberté.

¹⁷¹ « L’Éternel avait dit à Abram : “Éloigne-toi de ton pays, de ton lieu natal et de la maison paternelle, et va au pays que je t’indiquerai. Je te ferai devenir une grande nation; je te bénirai, je rendrai ton nom glorieux, et tu seras un type de bénédiction. Je bénirai ceux qui te béniront, et qui t’outragera je le maudirai; et par toi seront heureuses toutes les races de la terre” » (*Pentateuque, Genèse 12, 3*).

¹⁷² Emeric DEUTSCH (2008). *Lire, étudier après la Catastrophe (2/5)*, « Vivre et non survivre », site : <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/lire-etudier-apres-la-catastrophe/vivre-et-non-survivre-07-09-2009-7866_4212.php>.

¹⁷³ *Pentateuque, Deutéronome 32, 7*. Commentaire de RACHI : Souviens-toi des jours du monde. Ce qu’Il a fait aux premiers qui L’ont irrité. Méditez les années de génération en génération. La génération d’Enoch qu’Il a submergée sous les eaux de l’océan, et celle du déluge qu’Il a noyée. Autre explication : Vous n’avez pas prêté attention au passé, « méditez les années de génération en génération », [c’est-à-dire des générations futures], pour connaître l’avenir, car il dépend de Lui de vous combler de bienfaits et de vous faire hériter de l’ère messianique et du monde à venir. Interroge ton père. Ce sont les prophètes, que l’on appelle les « pères », comme il est écrit en parlant d’Eliyahou : « Mon père, mon père, char d’Israël... » (*II Melakhim 2, 12*). Tes anciens. Ce sont les Sages. Et ils te diront Les événements du passé.

In respect to old age, in accordance with Kohelet, the assessment of one's life becomes the cornerstone of each person's summoning resources to take charge of his / her own life – and in a fundamental manner, responsibility toward the future. Significantly, this responsibility involves the accomplishment of a three-fold duty.

The first one concerns the transmission of the teachings and the project of the Torah to generations to come, especially to grandchildren. The second concerns pursuing the study of Torah as long as possible during old age. Finally, in regard to teachers, from the most eminent to the most modest, their duty is to continue to teach and take on disciples¹⁷⁴, even while leaving the way open for exploration, questioning and interpretation all of which remain at the heart of handing down the heritage, so that “being faithful to Scriptures does not become petrified out of stubborn respect and blind rejection of time and history”¹⁷⁵. It means to follow among others “the example of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav¹⁷⁶. Feeling that death was near, he burned one of his writings. [...] In the final analysis, is it not necessary to “destroy” books in order to give birth to thought, in order to create renewal of meaning? [...] For, as Rabbi Nahman put it, “It is forbidden to be old.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Voir *Hagiographes, Proverbes 17, 6*. Voir Mishna *Traité des pères*, chap. 1, mishna 6 : « Fais-toi un maître, acquiers-toi un ami et juge tout homme en lui trouvant des circonstances bienveillantes », site : <http://www.akadem.org/recherche/>. Voir également : *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Yebamoth 62 b.

¹⁷⁵ Marc-Alain OUAKNIN (1986). *Op. cit.*, présentation de l'ouvrage.

¹⁷⁶ Maître hassidique (1772-1810).

¹⁷⁷ Marc-Alain OUAKNIN (1986). *Op. cit.*, présentation de l'ouvrage.

The obligation to continue one's integration in daily life, as set by tradition, takes a concrete form along a number of modes. One of these sees centenarians plant trees for the sake of their grandchildren¹⁷⁸ and continue to flourish, that is to say, remain attentive to the future – this in radical contrast with contemporary culture which does not easily provide meaning to old age, to attribute value to its potential or to entrust it with genuine moral or societal responsibilities: *“The righteous man springs up like the palm tree, Like the Lebanon cedar he towers. Planted in the house of the Lord, in the courts of our God they flourish. They bear fruit still in old age, fresh and full of sap they are.”* (Psalms 92: 13-15).

As an example of this, the Book of Ruth illustrates the case where fulfilling this duty does not follow the conventional path, but rather goes through Ruth's attachment, while still young and fecund, to Naomi, her first husband's mother who is now without descendants. On the advice of Naomi, Ruth has married the elderly Boaz¹⁷⁹ and sees Naomi take the child of this union on her lap in order for him to become in her old age a source of future descendants and in time a support and source of consolation for her:

And the women said to Naomi, “Blessed is the Lord, Who has not deprived you of a redeemer today, and let his name be proclaimed in Israel. And may he be a restorer of life for you and a support for your old age, as your daughter-in-law, whom you love, has borne him, who has been better to you than seven

¹⁷⁸ *Ecclésiaste Rabbah* 2 : 20, 1-21.

¹⁷⁹ Voir, sur le caractère exceptionnel de l'union de Booz et Ruth et de la naissance de leur fils, Sonia Sarah LIPSYC, (1999). *Op. cit.* p.35.

sons.” And Naomi took the child and placed him in her lap and became a nurse for him. And the neighbour women called a name for him, saying, “A son is born to Naomi,” and they called his name Obed – he was father of Jesse father of David. . (Ruth 4: 14-17)

The same book illustrates, this time in regard to Boaz, the conviction that each person is capable of changing his life up to the very last instant. Here again the concept of regeneration and faithfulness plays a central role in the vision of finding oneself anew as an option for the freedom to surpass a comfortable existence and to be open to the future. Thus, Boaz is elderly, wealthy and respected, peacefully living his life into advanced old age. But Ruth leads him to catch a glimpse of a new moral horizon by telling her own story of her desire for children and the new destiny that could be his if, as she invites him to do, were he to wed her¹⁸⁰. By her words and deed, Ruth leads Boaz out of his vision of his own destiny, and even though he is old, entreats him to renew himself by assuming the role of future redeemer. Boaz’s personal renewal -- but Ruth’s as well, based on the loss of the stigma of being an outsider that she had borne – will lead to the birth of a son and the founding of the Davidic line. Boaz offers praise to Ruth for not having turned to a young man. He gives

¹⁸⁰ Beth KISSILEF (2011). « The story of Shavuot », *The Jerusalem Report*, vol. xxii, n° 5, p. 45. Selon la tradition, l’union de Booz et de Ruth ne dure qu’une nuit, à l’issue de laquelle Booz meurt.

a sober response to her request, one appropriate to his age¹⁸¹. But, his old age also and above all, gives evidence of the fundamental importance of the freedom to open oneself up to another future, to opt for regeneration and fruitfulness in its two-sided manifestation of self-transformation and of giving a new direction to the future. These are therefore both also always possible, whatever one's age.

But what is one to do with the rest of one's life when sickness, isolation and advanced old age radically limit the obligation to be oneself and to realize one's unique potential¹⁸², when they seriously hinder the obligation to make one's mark, to write one's own story, that is to create oneself anew by renewing the meaning of one's existence ?¹⁸³. With the metaphor of the "broken Tablets," tradition prescribes that each person must see his or her own place in the world recognized by others, throughout his entire life up to the great pain of the final loss of memory.

On the horizon of the project of human brotherhood

The spiritual challenge posed these days by the increased longevity of a growing number of people is two-fold. On the one hand, people

¹⁸¹ *La Bible. Nouvelle traduction* (2001), Paris, Montréal, Bayard, Médiaspaul, *Livre de Ruth* 3, 10, p. 1603.

¹⁸² Martin BUBER (1964), dans une citation traduite de l'hébreu par et dans Marc-Alain OUKNIN, *Le livre brûlé*, Paris, Lieu Commun, 1986, p. 89.

¹⁸³ Martin BUBER (1964), dans une citation traduite de l'hébreu par et dans Marc-Alain OUKNIN, *Le livre brûlé*, Paris, Lieu Commun, 1986, p. 89.

see years or decades of future life stretching out in front of them without being able to perform the professional and familial roles that had previously defined them. On the other hand, they are immersed in a society whose chief message is that the main preoccupations of old age are leisure activities, participation in social life and learning experiences, all based on personal satisfaction.

This challenge is met by Jewish tradition in terms of the persistence of the awareness of the obligation to fulfill moral duties, in accordance with one's own capacities, but up to the very end within society. No duty is insignificant. Rather, all duties continue to confer on the person the sense of his or her worth, through his or her taking part in the creation of a more ethical collective future.

“For this command which I charge you today is not too wondrous for you nor is it distant. It is not in the heavens to say, ‘Who will go up to us to the heavens and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?’ And it is not beyond the sea, to say, ‘Who will cross over for us beyond the sea and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?’ (Deuteronomy 30: 11-13)

These verses reinforce the idea that commandments are neither distant abstractions nor unattainable objectives. Thus, they authorize the idea, which is permitted in the practical applications of commandments, that it is possible, in case of infirmity, illness or weakness, to establish a kind of scale of observance of commandments, which are then adapted to the handicap in question.

The intention is to ask oneself what can be done in spite of this handicap, to do as much as one can. For, whatever can be done

counts regarding *tikkun ha-olam*, i.e., which contributes to the completion of the task of building the world, at every stage of life, as well as in making it through the trials of old age.

The application of this idea is by no means the sole responsibility of those whose faculties are diminished by old age (or in a more general sense, of the ill or infirm). It is also the responsibility of those around them. They are expected to facilitate the performance of the commandments and to help the elderly, as well as the ill and infirm, as long as it is possible, to acknowledge that they still have a place within the community, that they are still necessary for *tikkun olam* and they still have a contribution to make to the ongoing creation of the group.

One of the essential groundings of ethical universe defined by tradition around longevity is to be found in the Fifth Commandment, formulated twice in the Decalogue¹⁸⁴. On the first set of Tablets, the

¹⁸⁴ Le terme français Décalogue vient de *dekálogos*, qui traduit en grec, dans la version des Septante de la Bible, les termes originaux *Aséret ha-Dibberot* (עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרֹת). Inscrit sur les premières puis sur les deuxièmes Tables de la Loi, le Décalogue constitue le noyau du code moral du judaïsme. Sa première énonciation figure dans le deuxième livre du Pentateuque et retient, pour traduire *Aséret ha-Dibberot*, l'expression qui est restée la plus connue dans le monde occidental, soit « Les Dix Commandements » : « Et il [Moïse] passa là avec le Seigneur quarante jours et quarante nuits, ne mangeant point de pain, ne buvant point d'eau; et Dieu écrivit sur les tables les paroles de l'alliance, les dix commandements » (*Pentateuque, Exode 34, 28*). Sa seconde énonciation figure dans le cinquième livre du Pentateuque et retient, pour traduire ces termes bibliques originaux, l'expression « Les Dix Paroles » : « Et il vous promulgua son alliance, qu'il vous enjoignait d'observer, à savoir les dix paroles. Puis il les écrivit sur deux tables de pierre » (*Pentateuque, Deutéronome ch. 4, v. 13*).

L'expression « Les Dix Paroles » est retenue par les commentateurs classiques et contemporains dans la mesure où elle renvoie à la centralité de la parole dans la vision juive de la création du monde, mais aussi parce qu'elle ouvre le vaste champ des devoirs religieux et moraux énoncés par la Torah et, enfin, parce qu'elle dépasse les prescriptions pratiques associées à ces devoirs.

performance of the obligation to honour one's parents is explicitly connected to the reward of a long life, both individual and for the nation¹⁸⁵, in the Promised Land: "*Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long on the soil that the Lord your God has given you.*" (Exodus 20:12)

The formulation of this same commandment on the second set of Tablets contains two additional ideas: namely, the divine origin of the obligation and the bliss with which its performance will be rewarded. "*Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has charged you, so that you're your days may be long and so that He may do well with you on the soil that the Lord your God has given you.*"¹⁸⁶ (Deuteronomy 5:16) This commandment, reiterated in the Book of Leviticus, is stated in terms of the duty of reverence: "*Every man shall revere his mother and his father, and My Sabbaths shall you keep.*" (Leviticus 19:3)

Reverence is respect mixed with fear and, like honour, it is a manner of being and relating to one's parents manifested in concrete

¹⁸⁵ IBN EZRA, SFORNO, S.R. HIRSCH, cités dans Méir TAPIERO « Honore ton père et ta mère ... », *Les Dix Paroles*, Paris, Les éditions du Cerf, 1995, p. 296.

¹⁸⁶ Ce commandement est l'un des trois commandements du Décalogue dits positifs, tandis que les sept autres commencent par la négation *lo*, soit « ne pas ». C'est le seul du Décalogue et l'un des rares 613 devoirs religieux d'origine biblique pour lequel une récompense est signalée. Il énonce une obligation égalitaire à l'égard des deux parents (MAÏMONIDE, *Michneh Torah*, Lois des révoltés, 6:2, cité dans Georges HANSEL (2005), *Respect des parents, raison et identité*, site : <<http://ghansel.free.fr/kiboud.html>>. Page consultée le 10 février 2013.

behavior¹⁸⁷. It is connected to the reminder of the obligation to respect the Sabbath, a reminder that sets up a twofold limitation. The first of these limits the duty of performing this commandment when the father or mother's behavior is immoral¹⁸⁸. The second refers to the limit, or rather limits, we might say, of the human being himself. *Kabed et avikha ve-et imekha* (Honour your father and your mother) should thus be understood and translated according to the etymological meaning of *kaved* (honour) = heavy (thus allowing us to translate the commandment) "Be heavily aware that you have a father and a mother," in other words, "Be heavily aware of the fact that you are not God."¹⁸⁹

Jewish tradition considers the honor¹⁹⁰ and respect shown to parents to be a commandment stemming from human reason and a facet of universal moral consciousness. Still, it bestows this commandment with the meaning of taking on the "line of descent inherent to the

¹⁸⁷ Commentaire de RACHI de *Lévitique* 19, 3 : « En quoi consiste sa "crainte"? À ne pas s'asseoir à sa place, à ne pas parler à sa place, à ne pas le contredire. Et en quoi consiste son "honneur"? À lui donner à manger et à boire, à lui procurer vêtements et chaussures, à l'escorter à sa venue et à sa sortie (*Qiddouchin* 31b). » Voir site : <http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque_L%E9vitique_19_3.aspx>.

¹⁸⁸ Commentaire de RACHI de *Lévitique* 19, 3 : « En quoi consiste sa "crainte"? À ne pas s'asseoir à sa place, à ne pas parler à sa place, à ne pas le contredire. Et en quoi consiste son "honneur"? À lui donner à manger et à boire, à lui procurer vêtements et chaussures, à l'escorter à sa venue et à sa sortie (*Qiddouchin* 31b). » Voir site : <http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque_L%E9vitique_19_3.aspx>.

¹⁸⁹ André Aharon FRAENKEL (1995) « "Honore ton père et ta mère..." Du père au Père », dans Méir TAPIERO (1995) (sous la direction de) *Les Dix Paroles*, op.cit., p. 307.

¹⁹⁰ « La loi talmudique définit le contenu concret des obligations de respect et d'honneur et il faut souligner le déplacement de sens qu'elle fait subir à la notion d'honneur. En effet l'*honneur* rendu aux parents est compris par le Talmud comme *service* et *obéissance*, ce qui s'écarte quelque peu du sens courant. » Georges HANSEL (2005), *Respect des parents, raison et identité*, op. cit.

Community of Israel [which] is not limited to the body of Jews alive at any given time but is constituted in a historic process unfolding from generation to generation.”¹⁹¹

The most frequent term used in Biblical text to designate the concept of “history” is *toldot* “... which expresses the specificity of the Hebraic mentality [...] [and which] does signify “history,” but in the sense of “begetting /generations.”¹⁹²

Indeed, for the Hebrew consciousness, and this is one of its basic intuitions, what is important in history is essentially not events ... The history that is important is the history of human identity of the subject, of his being...i.e., the history of a modification of human identity which, following this logic, is oriented according to a point of departure and culmination, which is called messianic, and hence according to an ultimate goal.

For the Hebrew, if indeed history has a meaning, it is one of direction, of creating a human identity that the Prophets of Israel called “son of man,” an expression that must be taken in its fullest sense: not only begetting, reproduction, multiplication, but literally the work of creation, from out of the original identity, of a human identity in which the problems, conflicts, and contradictions of our world would be resolved¹⁹³.

As soon as he bursts into the world, the subject inherits “along with the bodily expression of his self, his individual uniqueness, an extra

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Léon ASKÉNAZI (1999). Op. cit. p. 208.

measure of identity coming from his parents, which gives more substance to his own uniqueness and becomes part of them.

This “extra measure of identity” must be assumed and respected, as a kind of precious depository which both belongs and does not belong to [him/ her] ...which both comprises and transcends him.”¹⁹⁴ One of the concrete forms of one’s taking responsibility for this extra measure of identity is the obligation, among many others, to honour and to fear one’s parents as both receivers and bearers vis-à-vis their descendants of the sense of belonging and contributing to the historic dynamic of begetting and creation.

The worth and finality of this sense of belonging pertain to the project, formulated as early as the Book of Genesis, of the ultimate formation of a humanity fully committed to ethics, righteousness and justice. In other terms, the profound significance of the Fifth Commandment is to pursue the historical process -- begun thousands of years ago with Abraham¹⁹⁵ – of engendering a humankind which becomes more perfected as, generation after generation, it moves away from immorality and injustice. Or, to put it in Biblical language, so that men “observe the way of the Lord” in order to engender a humanity which has fulfilled its mission. Received as a commandment, respect for father and mother is

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ « Si je l’ai distingué, c’est pour qu’il prescrive à ses fils et à sa maison après lui d’observer la voie de l’Éternel, en pratiquant la vertu et la justice; afin que l’Éternel accomplisse sur Abraham ce qu’il a déclaré à son égard » (Pentateuque, Genèse 18, 19).

assumed by children as an integral part of the historical responsibility of humanizing humanity.

That is to say that, in the succession of generations, the subject in his turn, during his youth and adulthood, and even more in old age, has the obligation to pass on to his descendants the responsibility for the extra measure of identity inherent to by belonging to the project that he himself received. Therein lies one of the sources of the enduring concern of old age to suppress anything which threatens to break this chain. It is here that the obligation of the person's name find their fundamental meaning. The deepening of the project inscribed in the name, the assumption of personal risk that it implies, and the potential for individual transformation stemming from this movement of the subject toward his name constitute so many dimensions of the pursuit of history and the individual contribution toward a more ethical world. Similarly, the potential for individual change to which this movement of the subject toward his name leads. This is also is the locus of the interrogations being a father and being a son that hold such an important place in Biblical narrative. Which son? Which son for which father, or just as importantly, if we think of Sarah, Rebecca or Hanna, for which mother?

Let us consider the stories of brothers – friendly, rivals, twins, as well as the crimes, subterfuges, reconciliations and alliances that they experience on the one hand, and the stories of barrenness and fruitfulness on the other, as well as the stories of breaches between father and son. Considered together, these stories

although each in its own particular manner, direct us to the central question being a father, mother and son, to provide the ethical grounding for the succession of generations. The transmission operates along several movements: the father's desire to transmit, the mother's to choose the son most able to take on the responsibility of bringing into being the destiny of the nation, and the son's desire to receive the heritage offered by the father in order to take his place in the chain of generations. Biblical narratives devote considerable attention to the inner evolution of their characters and to the way this evolution manifests itself for each one starting from his own inwardness, his own journey and his own way of relating to God. This is so that each one, through his own desire, may allow the other to fulfill his role as father or as son.

Obviously, it is not a matter here of biological filiation, but rather a matter of acknowledging the condition of being a father or being a son. The obstacles to such an acknowledgment are legion in the Biblical stories, which thereby emphasizes that the ethical progress of history is a difficult and tumultuous achievement. Neither it is a matter of formal recognition, expressed in terms of conventional social designations of places in the chain of generations, but rather of the son's acknowledgment, in the figure of the father, of the share of justice and righteousness that may contribute to the advent of morally-accomplished humanity. It is equally a matter of the father's acknowledgment of this same potential in his son. This potential is the capacity to be fraternal:

In reading these stories of conflictual parental relationships... in the unfolding of these family situations, one quickly realizes that the focus of interest lies in what one has to call "fraternity search" in the sense that one speaks of a paternity test. One discovers the principle that the history of mankind can be thought of as the history of a father, the man who seeks to engender a son capable of being a brother¹⁹⁶.

“[The history of Israel is] the history of an undertaking: to make the human being fraternal, to construct brotherhood.”¹⁹⁷ In Jewish tradition, it is the signal task of old age to begin or to continue to take part in this undertaking. This is its ultimate objective and not, as the philosophical project of Classical antiquity considers it, to achieve serenity. Located in the perspective of fruitfulness and regeneration on the horizon of the historical advent of brotherhood, old age does not take on as its sole ambition temperance and reason once the passions have been calmed and the mind has been freed from the tyranny of drives, as these philosophers and their numerous heirs would have it. Fully part of life, the calling of old age is ethical; it opens a horizon of life which may become the highest point of a life when it is accomplished in contributing to regeneration. In a contemporary context and thought out in terms of values, this calling for old age consists of active and deliberate participation in the chain of generations, i.e., in assuming the transmission of a specific ethical vision aspiring to a fraternal hu

¹⁹⁶ Léon ASKÉNAZI (1999). *Op. cit.* p. 197.

¹⁹⁷ *Op. cit.* p. 220.

Translator's Notes:

1. The term “*engendrement*”, which appears in the title of this work and frequently throughout the text, does not possess any obvious English equivalent. It literally means “begetting,” and refers to the numerous ‘begettings’ in the Book of Genesis.

However, the French term has much richer connotations, encompassing the notions of fruitfulness and creativity, in both the biological and spiritual senses. It should be noted that

‘*engendrement*’ was the term used by the noted French Jewish philosopher and Biblical exegete Léon Ashkenazi to translate the Hebrew ‘*toldot*’ (See Chapter 1, Footnote 2)

2. The term “Ha-Shem” (literally “The Name”) found in a number of quotations cited throughout the text is used in Jewish tradition as a substitute for the various names of God.

3. In this work, we have used Robert Alter’s masterful translations of Biblical texts: for the Pentateuch, *The Five Books of Moses*, New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2004; *Ancient Israel, The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings*, New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2013; *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes*, New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2010.

Foreword

1. *All reference to the three sections which comprise the Hebrew Bible: Pentateuch, Prophets and Writings are....*

Chapter 1

2. Or, according to Rashi, “This is the book of the generations of Adam. It is the enumeration (*sefira*) of the generations that came after Adam.”

Rabbi Shlomo Ben Itzhak Hatsarfati, known as Rashi (Troyes, France 1040-1105) was an exegete, jurist and legal authority. He was also a poet and winegrower. He remains one the main authorities in Judaism. His commentary, written in the Middle Ages, on almost the entire Hebrew Bible and Babylonian Talmud,

is still considered as an indispensable tool to the study of these texts. For an account of the different uses of the term *toldot* (תולדות) in Genesis, see Tamar Schwartz, Bereshit: Des mots pour crier, conference 2008, site: <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5769/-dans-les-mots-5769/berechit-des-mots-pour-cree-15-10-2008-7442_4312.php>.

To comprehend the significant differences between the four ways of spelling this term in the Bible, see also the site: <http://www.akadem.org/medias/documents/1_toldot-cit.pdf>.

For an analysis of the notion of *toldot* as defining both the cosmogonic future and human genealogy, see Charles Mopsik, *Le sexe des âmes. Atlas de la différence sexuelle dans la cabale*, lecture 2003, site: <<http://www.lyber-eclat.net/lyber/mopsik1/intro.html>>, This page was consulted on February 17, 2013.

3. Genesis devotes the thirty-two verses of Chapter 5 to spelling out the *toldot* / begettings of mankind, from Adam to Noah, father of Shem, then of Ham and Japheth, thus emphasizing the centrality of the notion of begetting in the identity of the Hebrew, and later of the people of Israel, and finally of the Jewish people.
4. The term “Semite” was created based on the name of Shem, the direct ancestor of the founder of the Jewish people, Abraham.
5. From the Hebrew נח, No’ah, the name Noah signifies ‘rest’ or ‘consolation.’ According to tradition, he is the child who bears God’s hope. “Lamech [son of Methuselah], having lived 182 years, begot a son. And he called his name Noah, as to say, ‘This one will console us for the pain of our hands’ work, from the soil which the Lord cursed.”(Genesis 5: 28-29)

Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 5:29: “This one will console us. The word “yenahamenu” (he will console us) can be broken up into

yenah and *mimenu* (he will cause our suffering to end). Up to the time of Noah, mankind did not possess any tools for plowing. He is the one who made them. When wheat was sown, the earth produced brambles and thorns on account of the curse delivered against Adam (Midrash tanhuma). The period of Noah marked the end of these disasters.”

6. “And it happened as humankind began to multiply over the earth and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were comely, and they took themselves wives howsoever they chose.” (Genesis 6:1-2)

7. “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. This is the lineage of Noah – Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time, Noah walked with God...” (Genesis 6:9)

8. “And the Lord said, ‘I will wipe out the human race I created from the face of the earth, from human to cattle to crawling thing to the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I have made them.’”

9. “According to Rashi, Ham not only saw his father’s nakedness, but also castrated him” to prevent him from having a fourth child. See : [http://www.akadem.org/ medias/documents/quatrieme-fils-Doc.3.pdf](http://www.akadem.org/medias/documents/quatrieme-fils-Doc.3.pdf)>

10. Rendered in Hebrew by the notion of “*hesed*.”

11. Revealed by Moses on Mount Sinai, the Torah is referred to in several ways, viz., “The Book of the Torah of Moses” (*Sefer Torat Moshe*), The Book of the Torah of God by the Hand of Moses” (*Sefer Torat Ha-Shem beyad Moshe*) and “The Book of Moses” (*Sefer Moshe*).

12. Rashi’s Commentary on Exodus 20:12: “To sanctify me. For had you spoken to the rock and had the rock caused water to spring forth, I would have been sanctified in the eyes of the people which would have told themselves: ‘If this rock which neither speaks nor hears nor needs food, obeys the command of Hashem, how much more it is incumbent upon us to do so!’ In

other terms, Moses did not see that the Hebrew people was also united in a common project and that witnessing the miracle activated by the word would have confirmed their sense of obligation to obey the commandments.”

13. “... because you two betrayed Me in the midst of the Israelites through the waters of Meribath-Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin, because you did not sanctify Me in the midst of the Israelites. For from the far side you will see the land, but you will not come there, to the land that I give to the Israelites.” (Deuteronomy 32:51-52)

Chapter II

14. “He added: ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and [the God] of Jacob...’ Moses covered his face, fearing to look upon the Lord.” (Exodus 3:6)

15. For a study on Abraham’s questioning God, see Yossef Attoun, *Haazinou: la force du collectif*, Lecture 2007, site: http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/parachat-hachovoua-5767/haazinou-la-force-du-collectif-26-08-2007-7027_4314.phb Page consulted on October 25, 2012.

16. Rashi’s commentary on Exodus 4:10: “With a heavy tongue, I speak heavily. In medieval Italian, ‘balbo’ (stammerer). site: <http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque/Exode/4/10.aspx>

17. Sonia Sarah Lipsyc, *Le livre de Ruth ou le chemin des âmes. De la possession (dibbouk) à l’union (dévékout)*, Montréal, Manuscript deposited in the SACD, Paris, 1999, p. 20.

18. See, e.g., what some commentators consider to be Abram’s (later, Abraham) transgression in passing off his very beautiful wife Sarai (later Sarah) as his sister when he was in Egypt, thereby leading to her abduction to Pharaoh’s palace (Genesis 12:10-20) See also, e.g., the adultery committed by

David with Bathsheba whose husband Uriah David orders to be placed in a life-threatening position on the battlefield. (Samuel 2 11:1-27) See also an example regarding on the great female figures of the Bible, the accusation brought against Deborah the prophetess, military leader and only female judge in the Bible (Judges 4:6)

19. The responsibility of the individual to contribute to the completion the world by the application of the commandments of the Torah is conveyed by the fundamental notion of Tikkun, to which we will have occasion to return. For this, see: Schmuël Trigano, *Témoignage de la présence de l'absence*, Lecture 2008, site: <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/pourquoi-israel-la-quete-du-sens-de-l-existence-juive/temogner-de-la-presence-de-l-absence-04-04-2008-7258_4189.php>page consulted on October 25, 2012.

20. This task is embodied in particular by the obligation to accomplish acts of *tsedaka*, that is, acts of justice and righteousness which by means of human activity, contribute to the realization of the Divine project of a mankind, all the more free by acting out of choice for a world based on ethics. The popular use of the term “*tsedaka*” for the giving of charity illustrates one of the forms of this justice. “Active contribution by individuals to the advent of a just world is a fundamental religious and moral obligation for each and everyone. [...] It is at the same time, along with study of Torah and worship (*avoda*) that on which the world stands.” Jean-Christophe Attias & Esther Benbassa, *Dictionnaire de civilisation juive*, article “Charié et solidarité,” Paris: Larousse-Borda, 1995, pp. 46-47.

21. Léon Askenazi, *La parole et l'écrit*, vol I, *Penser la tradition juive aujourd'hui*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1999, p. 128.

Chapter III

22. "And her rival [Peninah, Elkana's first wife] would torment her sorely so as to provoke her because the Lord had closed up her womb." (Samuel I 1:5)
23. See the article "Hanna" in Pauline Bebe, *Isha. Dictionnaire des femmes et judaïsme*, Paris: Calmant-Lévy, 200, pp. 148-151. For a more general analysis of prayer in Judaism, see Léon Ashkenazi, "Approche de la prière juive," in *La parole et l'écrit*, vol. I, *Penser la tradition juive aujourd'hui*, pp. 367-372.
24. Second wife of Elkana, who bears a great love toward her, and mother of Samuel, the last of the judges, Hanna is one of the seven Biblical prophetesses.
25. Article "Charité," in Geoffrey Wigoder (ed.), *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du judaïsme*, Paris: Cerf et Robert Laffont, coll. Bouquins, 1996, pp. 194-196.
26. Within the system of Rabbinical jurisprudence (*halacha*), these ethical questions are the subject of rules and procedures (*taqqanot*): "The sages were aware that no legal code can anticipate all the economic and social circumstances of the future and hence it must contain a procedure which will allow maintaining law and order through the elaboration of new rules. In Halacha, these rules are known as *taqqanot*." Article "Halakhah" in Geoffrey Wigoder (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 416.
27. Commentary on Psalm 71:17.
28. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem: Keter, 1972, pp. 346-347. As an example, there were 67 old age homes for Jewish community of Germany in 1938.

Chapter IV

29. Israel is the name that was given to Jacob at the conclusion of his wrestling match with the angel (Genesis 32:39) For more on

name changes in the Bible, see Chapter XIII.

30. Rashi gives the following details regarding the partial withdrawal of the Levites (*lewiim*) from their priestly duties: “This is the matter regarding the *lewiim*: age may render them ineligible, but not bodily defects (Hulin 24a) And he will no longer serve: for transporting (sacred objects) on his shoulders (Sifri). But he will go back to serving at the closing of the gates, as well as to singing and loading carts. This is the meaning of the words: ‘he will serve “with” his brothers (following verse), as Targum Onkelos renders it.” (See the site: <http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque_Nombres_4_23.aspx>

31. Identified by some rabbis with the judge Ibzan of Bethlehem (Judges 12:8), Boaz is considered to be the great man of his generation, “the prince of people.” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906, see site: <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3444-boaz>> Page consulted October 14, 2012.

32. “And when you reap your land’s harvest, you shall not finish off the edge of your field, nor pick up the gleanings of your harvest. And your vineyard you shall not pluck bare, nor pick up the the fallen fruit of your vineyard. For the poor and for the sojourner you shall leave them. I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19:10)

33. The literal meaning of Boaz is: “There is strength (*oz*) in him,” the word “strength” being understood in the sense of moral courage.

34. *Tsedakah* carries the meanings of charity, ethics and justice.

35. Maimonides. “Laws covering gifts to the poor,” quoted in Geoffrey Wigoder (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 196. Moses Maimonides, known as (Ha)Rambam or Maimonides (Cordoba, 1138 – Fostat, Egypt, 1204), exigete, legal authority, philosopher, physician, is, along with Rashi, one of the most influential figures of Judaism.

The name of the city of Bethlehem is composed of the Hebrew terms, *beth*(house) and *lehem* (bread), i.e., literally “the house of bread.”

36. Centuries earlier, Balak, leader of the people of Moab, had asked the prophet Balaam to curse the Hebrews who were then crossing the desert. Balaam did not manage to utter the curse, but this episode led Moses to forbid the members of the people of Israel to marry Moabites or, according to some Rabbinic sources, to forbid Israelite girls to marry Moabite men. (Numbers 22 ss)

37. “No Ammonite or Moabite shall come into the Lord’s assembly. Even his tenth generation shall not not into the Lord’s assembly ever. Because they did not greet you with break and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and for their hiring against you Balaam son Beor from Aram Naharaim to curse you.” (Deuternomy 23:5)

38. Tractate of Baba Batra 91a et b from the Babylonian Talmud, quoted by Sonia Sarah Lipsyc, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

39. Naomi is grief-stricken. “She said to her: ‘Do not call me Naomi any more, call me Mara [bitter] for the Lord has overwhelmed me with bitterness.” (Ruth 1:20)

40. (Ruth 1:14) The expression, “*VeRuth devekah bah*” here rendered by “cleaved to her steps” in which the verb is based on the ruth d.v/b.k (join, stick) allows, according to Sonia Sarah Lipsyc, the translation: “Ruth joined her (Naomi)” “The deep attachment, nay the osmosis, that this verb (the Hebrew infinitive *lidevok*) is even more apparent since it is followed by the preposition “in” (*be* in Hebrew). This expression, usually translated by “join in” or “join with” appears 26 times in the Bible. It always refers to a powerful connection between two entities or two elements.” (Sonia Sarah Lipsyc, *op. cit.*, p. 6)

41. In the sense of “do not upset me” in Yeshiva Dalsace, *La méguilat [Livre] Ruth revisitée. S’ouvrir aux nations*. Paris:

Akadem Studio, 2008. Site: <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/themes/limoud/lectures-bibliques/mequilot/s-ouvrir-aux-nations-03-06-2008-7335_238.php> Page consulted on January 14, 2013.

42. *Ruth Rabba* 2:13, cited in Pauline Bebe, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

43. Pauline Bebe, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

The law of levirate marriage (*yibum*) obligates the brother of the deceased to marry his sister-in-law when she is childless. If the brother of the deceased opts to marry the widow, the first male son born from this marriage, is to bear the name of the deceased. When the brother of the deceased refuses to marry the widow, she is allowed to marry someone else. In the Book of Ruth, there are two male relatives of Naomi: Peloni Almoni, uncle of Mahlon, Ruth's deceased husband; and, Boaz, the latter's cousin. Neither of these was obligated to observe the law of levirate marriage.

44. According to Jewish oral tradition, mankind in its entirety received seven laws, six of which were revealed to Adam and one to Noah. These comprise, before the Decalogue, a universal ethical code known as the “Noachide Laws” or “Seven Commandments of Noah.” In the eyes of this tradition, any non-Jew who observes these laws belongs to the Righteous of the Nations and has his share in the world to come. See site: <<http://www.adkadem.org/medias/documents/Noahides-doc2.pdf>> Page consulted on October 16, 2012

45. “Mishna Q. R. Tarpon was in the habit of saying: ‘The day is short, the work is great, the workmen are slothful, the reward is rich, and the Master is urgent,’ in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Aboth II:15, p. 66. See site: <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/t05/abo06.htm>> Page consulted on October 16, 2012.

46. According to Jewish tradition, the Book of Psalms was composed by King David, who reigned around 1000 BCE. On the other hand, some contemporary Biblical critics consider it as a collective work of anonymous authors.

47. The Treatise Avot is the translation of the original Hebrew Pirkei Avot, also known as Ethics of the Fathers, Maxims of the Fathers. Significantly, the Hebrew term “avot” can be translated as as ‘fathers’ or ‘first principles.’ This treatise contains memorable sayings of moral authorities and reflexions of a chiefly ethical nature. It covers around five centuries of teachings, from about 300 BCE to about 200 CE.

48. See Agostino Paravinci Bagliani, “Ages de la vie,” Dictionnaire raisonné de l’Occident médiéval, 1999, pp. 7-9. See also Jean-Pierre Bois, “Age, pauvreté ou richesse. Observation histoire sur la question des vieux et de l’argent,” *Gérontologie et société*, 2006/2, # 117, p. 17. See site: <<http://www.cairn.info/revue-gerontologie-et-societe-2006-2-pages-15.htm>> Page consulted on August 17, 2011.

49. According to Jewish tradition, Moses received a Written Torah (the Five Books of Moses) and an Oral Torah, one being the complement of the other. The Oral Torah was handed down and interpreted through the centuries, then set to writing in the 2nd century CE, consisting of the Mishna.

50. The Talmud (literally “study”), a fundamental text of Rabbinic Judaism, designates the redactional end-product of the oral tradition as developed in the Rabbinical circles of Babylonia and Palestine between the 1st and 7th centuries. The Talmud is comprised of the Mishna and the Gemara, which brings together the commentaries of the Sage of Israel on the Mishna up to the 5th century of the Common Era. As the basis of Jewish law (Halacha), the Talmud is second in importance only to the Pentateuch.

Chapter V

51. Ethics of the Fathers 5:25. See site:
<<http://massorti.com/Pirke-Avot-Maximes-des-Peres>> Page consulted on October 14, 2012.

52. “Provide yourself a *rav* (teacher) and acquire yourself (*kanay*) a friend.” Ethics of the Fathers 1:6. See site:
<<http://www.massorti.com/Pirke-Avot-Maximes-des-Peres>> Page consulted on October 14, 2012.

53. In the eyes of Jewish tradition, study from one generation to another, of the traditional texts that comprise the Torah, the Talmud and the Kabbala, as well more generally of Rabbinic literature, is a major factor in the elaboration of a common narrative identity and constitutes for that reason one of the dimensions of the continuing survival of Israel. This conviction emphasizes the importance for the Jewish people of the continuity of generations and the traumatic character that the perspective of a break in the loyalty to the shared heritage may

take on.

54. The Hebrew term used here is *zaken*.

55. “*Besovah tovah*” is translated here by a “happy old age.” The Hebrew term is derived from *seva*, which means “old man, graybeard.” Marc M. Cohn, *Lexique hébreu-français*, Tel Aviv: Schiassaf, 1978, p. 334. The literal meaning of this expression is “sated in years,” as a metaphoric expression which describes the act of aging in the description of the end of King David’s life, serving to glorify the close of an accomplished life in a happy old age.

56. Leviticus 19:32. Elie Munk, *La voix de la Thora*, Paris: Fondation Samuel et Odette Levy, 1981, p. 165.

57. Tractate Avot, The Hebrew term used is “shuah,” which refers both to the depth of thought and to stooping, a two-fold meaning which conjures up the universe of inwardness, as evidenced by another translation of this sentence: “Ninety [is the age] for [a] bending figure.” *Traité Aboth*, Seder Nezikin, in Mishnayot, New York: Yavneh Press, 1965, p. 535.

58. Since he was born immediately after Esau, which the text renders through the image according to which Jacob was born holding on to Esau’s heel. (Genesis 25:26)

59. Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 27:1.

60. Rebecca, mother of Esau and Jacob, consults God regarding her pregnancy. She receives a prophetic answer: she will bear two children who will be the ancestors of two nations. She represents the sole case in which God addresses one of the patriarchs. For an elaboration regarding this prophecy and the behavior of Rebecca and Jacob in this series of episodes in Genesis, see Philippe Haddad, *Jacob et Esaü, La fraternité dans la Genèse*, Lecture 2009. Site: <<http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/cours/la-fraternite-dans-la-bible/jacob-et-essau-02-07-2009->

[7802_4230.php](#)> Page consulted on November 14, 2012.

61. “Bring me some game and make me a dish that I may eat, and I shall bless you in the Lord’s presence before I die.”(Genesis 27:7) Rashi’s commentary: “Before Hashem with his consent, for He will approve my request.”

62. Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 27:33: “He was seized with a very violent trembling. The Targum translates this word which signifies great astonishment. And according to the Midrash, he saw hell open under his feet [i.e., under Esau’s feet] (Gur Aryeh).

63. Jacob has gone down in the tradition as the one among Isaac’s sons who possesses the inner conviction of being the best to bear the realization of the promise made to Abraham of a more moral universe. In this sense, he aspires to become “the first-born son of the world” and he takes upon himself the difficulties of assuming this role. He remains mistakenly in the memory of the people as the trickster. (*be-Mimra*) The origin of this image is found in the erroneous translation of *be-Mimra* which in the language of the Bible means “wisdom.” Jacob is wise because he is capable of evaluating his true worth. For a more developed examination of this topic, see Alain Michel, “Toldot: le sens d’un conflit fraternel.” in *Autour du droit d’aînesse*, #6, Lecture2008, Site:

<http://www.akadem.org/sommaie/paracha/5769/parachat-hachavoua-5769/toldot-le-sens-d-un-conflit-20-11-2008-7472_4310.php> Page consulted on November 12, 2012.

64. On David’s refusal, in spite of the chill he feels, to have intercourse with Abishag, Abishag’s reification and an elaboration of the political and phantasmic stakes of her instrumentalization, see Yeshaya Dalsace, *La mystérieuse Avisag* #5, Une femme fatale (‘Haye Sara), Lecture 2009, site:

<http://akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5770/haftarat-hachavoua-5770/une-femme-fatale-haye-sara-03-11-2009-7929_4315.php>. Page consulted on November 14, 2012.

Chapter VI : no footnotes

Chapter VII.

65. Yeshaya Dalsace, *op.cit.*

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*

68. “ And it happened on that day that Eli was lying in his place, his eyes had begun to grow bleary, he could not see.” (Samuel I 3:2) “And Eli was ninety-eight years old, his eyes were rigid and he could not see.” (Samuel I 4:15)

69. Among the 150 religious poems that comprise the Book of Psalms, only two deal with old age: Psalm 90 speaks to the brevity of life, while Psalm 71 deals with the private and social experience of the vulnerability of old age.

70. In Hebrew, the term *Kohelet* means, “the one who addresses the assembly.” We have adapted here the spelling used in La Bible: traduction du Rabinat. Akadem Multimedia. Site: <http://www.sefarim.fr> Other spellings, for example Qohelet, are used in other translations of the Bible and in non-Biblical literature. We have respected these spellings in citing works.

71. In the Greek translation of the Bible, known as the Septuagint, the title of the Book of Kohelet is rendered literally by the term Ecclesiastes. Kohelet is in Ketuvim (Writings). It forms a peak of poetry and rhythm, a melancholy treatise on the experience of growing old, but also of wisdom. After having been influential throughout the centuries, it still remains very current. Its impact goes well beyond the scope of Jewish tradition. Moreover, it figures among the most commented Biblical texts up to the present. Opening out to the vanity of all things to the point of clashing head on with certain articles of faith of Judaism, the book

turns back toward wisdom before a dramatic conclusion on the reverential fear of God as the only way for human beings.

Coming after Song of Songs, the work of King Solomon's youth and Proverbs, the work of his mature years, Kohelet is the work of his old age. This is the position of Jewish tradition, based in particular on the manner by which the author opens the text: "The words of Kohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1) and goes on a few verses later: "I, Kohelet, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem." (1:12). The traditional position is also based on stylistic similarities between Kohelet and the two other works of King Solomon, especially Song of Songs, and finally, on Solomon's legendary wisdom, illustrated by his Proverbs, among other works.

This position is contested by several Biblical critics who propose different dates for the text and offer the hypothesis of its reflecting several voices. This amounts to saying that several authors contributed to the text, at different periods, and that the author of Kohelet is in fact unknown. In particular, these critics, as opposed to Jewish tradition, consider that the conclusion of the book, which brings about a radical, apparently inexplicable, change of perspective: "The last word, all being hear: fear God and keep his commands; for that is all humankind." (12:13) was added by a anonymous pious hand.

72. Ecclesiastes 1:2-4. A number of the still current phrases demonstrate the influence of the vision of Kohelet in our culture, such as, "Nothing new under the sun (1:7), "Everything has its season," (3:1), etc.

73. The Hebrew term "hevel" which opens Kohelet and the repetition of which corresponds to the movement of the depressive spiral into which the old Ecclesiastes succumbs may be translated as 'vapour, mist' but also 'vanity, futility.' See Marc M. Cohen, *Lexique hébreu-français*, p. 66. We will come back to the significance of this polysemy.

74. Jean-Marc Talpin, "Lire *le vieillir* avec L'Ecclesiaste: le bilan entre dépression et sagesse," in Alain Montandon (ed.), *Eros*,

blessures et folie, Détresses du vieillir, Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaire Blaise Pascal, 2006, p. 19.

CHAPTER VIII

75. Yeshaya Dalsace, "Vanité des vanités. Kohlélet ou la critique de la civilisation," Lecture 2007, site: <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/themes/limoud/lectures-bibliques/cain-et-abel/kohelet-ou-la-critique-de-la-civilisation-06-11-2007-7088_236.php> Page consulted on November 2, 2012.

76. Yeshaya Dalsace, 2007, *op. cit.*

CHAPTER IX

77. Ethics of the Fathers 1:2. See site: <<http://www.massorti.com/Pirke-Avot-Maximes-des-Peres>> Page consulted on November 7, 2012.

78. In Hebrew, "*olam ha-ba.*"

79. Ecclesiastes 9:10, "*Sheol*, an untranslatable Hebrew term of uncertain etymology, refers to the abode of the dead or common resting place of mankind. There is no agreement regarding its status: is it or is it not an afterlife? Also known as "*dumah*," i.e., the house (or place) of silence, the final and eternal home, dark, chaotic, dusty and terrifying. Some texts (Psalms 86:13) make mention of those who are rescued or come back up from it. See site: <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13563-sheol>> Page consulted on November 7, 2012.

80. The Hebrew term *Tikkun* means 'redress, rectify, repair, correct.' See Marc M. Cohn, *Lexique hébreu-français*, p. 373. For the concept of *Tikkun*, see Shmuel Trigano, *Pourquoi Israël (3/8) Témoigner de l'absence*, Lecture 2008, site: <<http://>

www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/pourquoi-israel-la-qute-du-sens-de-l-existence-juive/temoigner-de-la-presence-de-l-absence-04-04-2008-7258_4189.php> Page consulted on October 25, 2012.

81. Ecclesiastes includes twelve chapters. The tone of the text changes beginning with Chapter 5, to continue building up until its conclusion.

82. Yeshaya Dalsace, 2007, *op. cit.*

83. Gilles Bernheim, *La rencontre impossible. Caïn et Abel*, Lecture 2007, site:

<<http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/cours/les-points-durs-de-la-tora/cain-et-abel-03-12-20007-7106-4246.php>> Page consulted on November 9, 2012.

84. Yeshaya Dalsace, 2007, *op. cit.*

85. Gérard Haddad, Qohelet et la question du désir, Lecture 2008, site: <http://psythere.free.fr/article-php?id_article=598&var_recherche=gerard+haddad>.

86. *Ibid.*

87. Article “Old Age,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906. See site: <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/article891-age-old>> Page consulted on Nov. 28, 2012.

88. “*And Abraham was old, well stricken in age*” is a translation of “Ve-avraham taken ba be-yamim” (Genesis 24:1).

89. “The gray-haired and the aged (ישיש) are with us, far older than your father.” (Job 15.10)

90. God is speaking to Abraham: (Genesis 15:15) “Be-sevah tovah” בשיבה טובה¹⁹⁸

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91. Article, "Old Age," *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Op. cit.
92. Both terms refer to an aged person.
93. Elda Weizman et Nitsa Shelef, "Le champs sémantique de la vieillesse en hébreu," in Alain Montandon (ed.) *Les mots du vieillir*, Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2004, pp. 58-59.

CHAPTER X

94. "Stand up before a hoary head, and honour the aged, fear your God. I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:32)
95. Rashi's commentary on Leviticus (Kedoshim) 19:32. See site: <http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque_L%E9vitique_19_32.aspx>
96. The quotation taken from the Talmud, Kiddushin 32b, to which Rashi refers, establishes an equivalence between old age and wisdom, "The old man is the one who has acquired wisdom."
97. Rashi's commentary on Leviticus (Kedoshim) 19:32, *op. cit.*
98. *The Guide for the Perplexed: A Treatise on Theology and Philosophy* by Moses ben Maimon, known as Maimonides. First published in the original Arabic and accompanied with a French translation and critical literary and explanatory notes by S. Munk, Member of the Institute and professor at the Collège de France, Volume 3, Paris: Chez A. Franck, 1866, p. 275.
99. Moses Maimonides, known as (Ha)Rambam or Maimonides.
100. Mishneh Torah of Maimonides, Sefer madder 6:9, see site: <http://www.fr.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/898359/Jewish/Chapitre-Six.htm> Page consulted on Nov. 12, 2012.

101. Elda Weizman & Nitsa Shelef, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
102. See the development that we allocated above to the question of the ages of life and the stages of old age, as well as to the sources: Genesis 6:3, Psalms 90:10, Ethics of the Fathers 5:25.
103. Emmanuel Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'Idée*, Paris: Vrin, 1982, p. 136.
104. Aaron D. Panken, *The Rhetoric of Innovation. Self-Conscious Legal Change in Rabbinic Literature*, University Press of America, 2005, see site: <<http://huc.edu/chronicle/65/articles/Excerpt.pdf>> Page consulted on Dec. 18, 2012.
105. See Mishna (Sotah 49b), Babylonian Talmud: "Youths will put old men to shame, the old will stand up in the presence of the young, a son will revile his father, a daughter will rise against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be the members of his household." site: <http://www.come-and-here.com/sotah/sotah_49.html#PARTb> Page consulted on Nov. 12, 2012.
106. Jacky Milewski, *Dignité dans l'oubli. Méditation talmudique*. Espace national de réflexion sur la maladie d'Alzheimer, Lecture 2011, site: <http://www.espace-ethique-alzheimer.org/resourcesdoc_ethiquesoins_milewski_dignitedansl'oubli.php> Page consulted on Nov. 12, 2012.
107. Tractate Berakhot 8b, Babylonian Talmud, cited in Jacky Milewski, *op. cit.*
108. *Lekhabdo*, derived from the term "kavod" in Hebrew.
109. Jacky Milewski, *op. cit.*
110. Lionel Naccache, *Quatre exercices de pensée juive pour cerveaux réfléchis. Le judaïsme à la lumière des neurosciences*,

Paris: Editions In Press, 2003, p. 156.

111. Jacky Milewski, *op. cit.*

112. Or, according to some exegetes, “the evils of old age.”

CHAPTER XI

113. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Du sacré au saint. Cinq nouvelles lectures talmudiques*, Paris: Ed. Minuit, 1977, p. 20.

114. Plato, *Œuvres complètes [Complete Works]*, (tr. Léon Robin & Joseph Moreau), Vol. 1, *La République [The Republic]* & Vol. 2, *Les Lois [The Laws]*, Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1950; Cicero (Marcus Tullius Cicero), *De Senectute [Of Old Age]*, tr. Vincent Ravasse, digitalized, site: <http://bcs.fltr.ucl.ac.be/sen/bv.html>

115. Jacob was Joseph’s father (Genesis 48:1)

116. In *La Voix de la Thora*, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

117. Jacob’s name is changed to Israel, after his encounter with the angel.

118. See site:

<http://www.akadem.org/media/documents/maladie-biblique-Doc1.pdf> > Page consulted on Oct. 14, 2012.

CHAPTER XII

119. David Banon, *Béréchit: La double dimension de l’humain*. Lecture 2012, site:

http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5773/paracha/berechit-la-double-dimension-de-l-humain-12-09-2012-46332_4440.phb

Page consulte on Nov. 18, 2012.

120. “To separate, in Hebrew is *lehavdil*, the root of which *b-l-d*

refers to the divine action of separating. This root appears explicitly five times in Genesis 4.6.7.14.18. As for the the notion of separation – and hence, that of the identity specific to the named thing or subject – it appears ten time, for example, in the guise of “according to its kind, [as, for example, in the verse: Genesis 1:11], David Banon, *op. cit.*

121. By name, we understand here what is usually called “first or given name.” In Hebrew documents, the person’s name is followed by the mention, “son of” or “daughter of” followed by the father’s name (first name). According to a more recent custom, which has become the custom in many circles, this mention is followed by the mother’s name. Jewish family names are either of Biblical origin and connected to priestly functions (such as Levy and Cohen) or derived from given names. They may also have various secular origins. In these latter cases, these names are composed according to the same models as the non-Jewish family names in these societies. See Marc-Alain Ouaknin, Dory Rottener, *Le livre des prénoms bibliques et hébraïques*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1997, pp. 280-281.

122. Yaïr Zakovitch, “Changer de destinée dans le monde de la Bible,” in *Leur nom, ils l’ont changé (4/7): La force du nom*, Lecture 2010. site: <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/la-force-du-nom/la-force-du-nom-02-03-2010-8046_4153.php> Page consulted Nov. 22, 2012.

123. Avigdor Shinan, “Comment s’appelait Moïse avant de s’appeler Moshé?”, in *Leur nom, ils l’ont changé (4/7): La force du nom*, Lecture 2010. site: <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/la-force-du-nom/la-force-du-nom-02-03-2010-8046_4153.php>

124. Rashi’s commentary on Exodus 2:10, “I drew him (*meshitihu*) out of the water (*min ha-mayim*). Aramaic translation [...]: *she’halte*, which means: ‘pull out’ [...] The Hebrew word *meshititu* also means, ‘remove,’ ‘distance’ [...] Still, in my opinion, the word

[is derived] from the root *masha* which means ‘take out.’ Moreover, the Talmud emphasizes the polysemy of Moses.” See Marc-Alain Ouaknin, Dory Rotnemer, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-41.

125. From the Hebrew, *ger*, “stranger” and *sham*, which means “there.”

126. Delphine Horvilleur, *Qui était Moïse?* Lecture 2011, site: <http://www.akadem.org/pour-commencer/les-personnages-bibliques-qui-etait-moise-14-09-2011-26979_4336.php> Page consulted on Nov. 22, 2012.

127. Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 25:25.

128. Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 25:26.

129. Marc-Alain Ouaknin, Dory Rotnemer, *op. cit.*, p. 76. For an elaboration on these commentaries, see Francine Kaufmann, *Les épisodes de nomination dans la Bible et les sources juives*, Lecture 2010, see site: <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/la-force-du-nom/la-force-du-nom-07-04-2010-8090_4153.php>

130. *Yeled* means both “child” and “to bear children,” while *yalad* signifies “to give birth to a child.”

131. Abram Coen, *Un nom pour la vie*, Lecture 2010, site: <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/la-force-du-nom/la-force-du-nom-02-03_2010-8046_4153.php>

132. Geoffrey Wigoder (ed.), *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du judaïsme*, 1996, p. 739 et Shemot Rabba I:28.

133. Alain Didier-Weill, *L’injonction nominative*. Colloque international 2009: *La force du nom*, site: <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/themes/philosophie/2011/module_7825.php?chapitre_courant-5> Page consulted on July 1, 2011.

134. Many of the texts of Biblical literature refer to them in this manner: Moses the meek one, Joseph the modest one.

135. Female barrenness is one of the recurrent themes in the Bible. Three of the four matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel, are long barren before they give birth to children; the only one of the matriarchs who is fruitful as soon as she is married to Jacob was Leah.

136. The use of the expression, *yimah shemo*, given here in Hebrew in its masculine form, literally means “may his name be blotted out.” It is still used in situations of particular gravity.

137. The custom in Jewish communities is to follow the names of deceased members of the family or teachers with the mention: *zikhrono livrakha*, literally meaning “of blessed memory.”

138. Eric Marty, *Et je leur donnerai un nom impérissable: Shoah de Claude Lanzman*. Colloque international 2009: La force du nom. See site: <http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/themes/philosophie/2/11/module_7874.php> Page consulted on July 1, 2011.

139. *Ibid.*

140. Memory (*zakhor*) plays an important role in Jewish history, even before the Jewish religion was constituted, and Judaism is still collective memory. Hence the importance for Jewish communities and for contemporary Judaism of especially keeping alive the victims of the Shoah in collective memory.

141. *Ibid.*

142. Exodus 17:14. In this episode, Amalek attacks Israel at Refidim, in the Sinai desert. Moses orders Joshua to fight. Joshua performed what Moses had told him to do, engaging them in victorious battle over Amalek and his people. (Exodus 17:8-13) Rashi's commentary: “Write this as a memorial. That Amalek was the first of all the peoples to attack Israel (Mekhilta). And place in

the ears of Yehoshu'a, The One who will bring Israel into its land, so that he will give him what he is due. One finds here an allusion given to Moshe that it is Yehoshua who will bring Israel into the Holy Land (Mekhilta). I will surely blot out. It is for this reason that I order this to you: I wish to blot him out." According to the interpretations, Amalek is presented as a man, enemy of Israel, but also as a violent, evil-doing tribe or as just a clan of looters. In the collective psyche of the Jewish people, he has remained as the symbol of the enemy who wishes to destroy Israel with no pity for any of its members in the name of a visceral hatred.

143. The prohibition of forgetting this is counted among the 613 religious obligations commanded by the Torah. See Yeshaya Dalsace. *Exterminer Amalek*, Lecture 2010, site: http://akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5770/haftarat-hachavoua-5770/exterminer-amalek-tetsave-15-02-2010-8027_4315.php Page consulted on Nov. 22, 2012.

144. According to the Zohar, the medieval text of esoteric and mystical exegesis of the Torah, is one of the principal books of Kabbalah, Amalek is not a people nor a man, but the dark side of the human which is expressed in magic, the evil desire, iniquity and injustice.

145. Elie Wiesel, *Lire, étudier après la Catastrophe. La force d'un survivant*. Lecture 2008, site: http://akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/lire-etudier-apres-la-catastrophe-la-force-d-un-survivant-12-01-2010-7978_4212.php

146. For the reading of the Divine injunction to exterminate Amalek (I Samuel 15:18) based on the Zohar, see Yeshaya Dalsace, Lecture 2010, *op. cit.*

147. We have limited ourselves for our study to a few cases of relevant name changes, but there are numerous examples of name changes in Biblical literature. See, for example, the article: *Shinnuy ha-shem* (Name change): "Solomon was called by Nathan 'Jedidiah' (God's beloved) because of the Lord" (II Sam.

xii:25). *Pharaoh- nechoh appointed Eliakim king of Jerusalem and changed his name to 'Jehoiakim.'* (=“The Lord’s confirmed”: II Kings xxiii:34) *The King of Babylon made Mattaniah king of Jerusalem and called him 'Zedekiah' (“The Lord’s right man): ib. xxiv:17); and the names of Daniel and his comrades were changed to Chaldaic ones (Dan. i:7) Isaiah predicted that Jerusalem would be called by a new name, 'Hophzi-bah.” (=My delight is in her’; Isa. lxii.4)”*
Site: <[http:// www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13583-shinnuy-ha-shem#](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13583-shinnuy-ha-shem#)>.

148. Genesis 17:1-5. “Abram means ‘Exalted Father.’ Abraham means ‘Father of a Multitude.’” In Marc-Alain Ouaknin, Dory Rotnemer, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 17:5. “I have established you a father of a multitude of nations (*av hamon*). This a play on words (*notariqon*) These are the very syllables that form Abraham’s name: *av hamon*. The letter *resh* [r] found in the name Abram signifies that he was merely the father of Aram (Berakhot 13a), his native land. Now, he becomes father of all mankind. This *resh* stays in its place.”

149. Genesis 17:15-16. Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 17:15: “Her name shall no longer be called Sarai. This word means, My ‘princess’, for me, but not for others, while “Sara,’ by itself means ‘princess’ for everyone (Berakhot 13a.).

150. Genesis 32:25-29. Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 32:29, “Ya’aqov he will be no longer. One will not longer be able to claim that it is through trickery and displacement (*iqva*, same root as *Ya’aqov*) that you have received the blessings, but rather through your worth and openly.

151. The prophet Joshua – *Yehoshua*, in Hebrew, meaning “God is salvation” – also possessed the qualities of judge and military leader and led Israel during the conquest of Canaan. His name remains attached to the conquest of Jericho. Joshua died at the age of 110. The name of Joshua is important in Christian tradition.

In its transcription into Greek, the theological implications will be of fundamental importance, this name will become Jesus.

152. Only Joshua and Caleb will return with positive descriptions of the Promised Land, while the ten other scouts will bring back slanderous reports.

153. Numbers 13:16. Moses changed the name of Hoshea Bin Nun to Yehoshua bin Nun by adding a *Yod* (y). The meaning of the name is modified, but the root remains the same: saviour.

154. Rashi's commentary on Numbers 13:16.

155. "As for you, you shall keep My commandments, you and your seed after you: every male among you must be circumcised." (Genesis 17:10)

156. Marc-Alain Ouaknin, Dory Rotnemer, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

157. Pour further development on the body-soul relation, see Mordekhaï Chriqui, *Cabale, corps et âme*, Lecture 2009, site: http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/themes/vie-juive/judaisme-au-quotidien/le-rapport-au-corps/table-ronde-cabale-corps-et-ame-22-10-2009-7915_315.phb.

158. Bernard Maruani. *Vayichla'h: la métamorphose de Jacob*, Lecture 2011, site: http://akadem.org/sommaire/paracha/5772/paracha/vayichla-h-la-metamorphose-de-jacob-29-11-2011-27093_4330.phb

159. Jacob is given the name Israel a second time in Genesis: "God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob, but henceforth your name will no longer be Jacob, your name will be Israel,' and thus he gave him the name Israel." (Genesis 35:10) Rashi's commentary on Genesis 35:10: "Your name will no longer be called *Ya'aqov*. This name, which refers to someone waiting in ambush to take someone by surprise (*'iqva*) will be replaced by Israel, which means "prince" or "chief."

160. Marc-Alain Ouaknin, Dory Rotnemer, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-39.
161. Talmud Rosh Hashana (R. H.) 16b., quoted by Geoffrey Wigoder (ed.),
Dictionnaire encyclopédique du judaïsme, p. 739.
162. Article: *Shinnuy ha-shem* (Name change). *ibid.*
163. As an illustration of this aspect of the relationship with time, tradition determines that the first duty that was assigned to the Jewish people newly freed from Egyptian slavery was to set themselves the dates of the religious festivals, and thus, to determine time, the mastery of which constitutes one of the fundamental manifestations of freedom.
164. “Go forth from your land and your birthplace and your father’s house to the land I will show you. And I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and those that damn you I will curse, and all the clans of the earth through you shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)
165. Emeric Deutsch, *Lire, étudier après la Catastrophe* (2/5), “Vivre et non survivre,” Lecture 2009, site:
<http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/lire-etudier-apres-la-catastrophe/vivre-et-non-survivre-07-09-2009-7866_4212.php>
166. Deuteronomy 32:7. Rashi’s commentary: “Remember the days of old. What He did to those who made lose patience in days of yore. Meditate on the years from generation to generation. The generation of Enoch that he submerged under the water of the ocean, and that of the Flood that he drowned. Another explanation: You have not heeded the past, “meditate on the years from generation to generation” [i.e., on generations to come], to know the future, since it depends on Him to lavish you with good things and to cause you to inherit the Messianic era and

the world to come. Question your father. It was the prophets, who are called the 'fathers,' since it is written in regard to Eliyahu, 'My father, my father, chariot of Israel,' (II Melakhim 2:12). Your elders. These are the Sages. And they will tell you the events of the past."

167. See Proverbs 17:6. See Mishnah Tractate Ethics of the Fathers I:6, "Make yourself a teacher; acquire a friend; and judge every person favorably." Site: <<http://www.akadem.org/recherche/>> See also Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yebamoth 62b.

168. Marc-Alain Ouaknin, op. cit, 1986, Introduction to the Text.

169. Hassidic master (1772-1810).

CHAPTER XIII : CONCLUSION

170. Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *op. cit.*, 1986, Introduction to the Text.

171. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 2:20, 1-21.

172. For the exceptional nature of the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, as well as the birth of their son, see Sonia Sarah Lipsyc, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 35.

173. Beth Kisslief, "The Story of Shavuot," *The Jerusalem Report*, vol. xxii, #5, 2001, p. 45. According to a tradition, the marriage of Boaz and Ruth lasted only one night, at the end of which Boaz died. In this regard, see Sonia Sarah Lipsyc, *op. cit.*, 1999.

174. *La Bible. Nouvelle traduction*, Paris, Montreal: Bayard, Médiaspaul, Livre de Ruth, 3, 10, 2001, p. 1603.

175. Martin Buber (1964) in a quotation translated from the Hebrew by and in Marc- Alain Ouaknin, *Le livre brûlé*, Paris: Lieu Commun, 1986, p. 89.

176. Emmanuel Lévinas, *L'au-delà du verset*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1982, p. 163, cited in Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

177. The English term Decalogue comes from *dekálogos*, which is a Greek translation in the Septuagint version of the Bible, of the original terms "Aseret Ha-Dibbrot" (עשרת הדברות). Engraved in the first, and then on the second, Tablets of the Law, the Decalogue constitutes the core of the moral code of Judaism. It is first formulated in the Second of the Five Books of Moses and retains, to translate Aseret ha-Dibbrot, the designation which is most common in the Western world, i.e., "The Ten Commandments". "And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. Bread he did not eat, nor water did he drink.

And he wrote on the tablet the words of the Covenant, the Ten Words [Commandments]”(Exodus 34:28) Its second formulation in the Fifth Book of Moses and to translate the original Biblical terms retains the designation, “The Ten Words”: “And he told you His covenant that He charged you to do, the Ten Words, and He wrote them on two tablets of stone” (Deuteronomy 4:13).

The designation, “The Ten Words,” has been retained by classic and contemporary commentators to the extent that it refers back to the central role of the word in the Biblical vision of the creation of the world, but also because it opens up the vast field of religious and moral obligations enunciated by the Torah, and lastly, because it goes beyond the practical instructions associated with these obligations.

178. Ibn Ezra, Sforno, S. R. Hirsch, quoted in Méir Tapiero, “Honore ton père et ta mère...,” *Les Dix Paroles*, Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1995, p. 296.

179. This commandment is one of three of the Ten Commandments considered as positive, while the other seven begin with the negative word *lo*, *i.e.*, “(do) not.” It is the only one of the Decalogue and one of the few of the 613 religious obligations of Biblical origin for which a reward is mentioned. It enunciates an egalitarian obligation in regard to both parents. (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, “Laws of Rebellious Ones,” 6:2, quoted in Georges Hansel, *Respect des parents, raison et identité*, 2005, site: <<http://ghansel.free.fr/kibboud.html>> Page consulted on Feb. 10, 2013.

180. Rashi’s commentary on Leviticus 19:3: “What does this “fear” consist of? Not sitting in his seat, in not contradicting him. What does this “honour” consist of? In providing food and drink for him, in procuring clothing and shoes for him, in accompanying him in his comings and goings. (Kiddushin 31b). See site: <http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque_L%E9vitque_19_3.aspx>

181. Rashi's commentary on Leviticus 19:3, "And you will keep my Sabbaths. The text compares observance of the Sabbath to the fear of the father in order to teach you that, notwithstanding the injunction that is imposed upon you to fear him, if he asks you to violate the Sabbath, do not listen to him (Yevamoth 5b). And similarly for all the other *mitsvot* [commandments, religious obligations]. I am Hashem, your Eloqim. Your father and you are both obligated to honour me. Thus you shall not listen to him to subvert me words." See site:

<[http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque_L
%E9vitque_19_3.aspx](http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque_L%E9vitque_19_3.aspx)>

182. André Aharon Fraenkel, "Honore ton père et ta mère..." Du père au Père, in Méir Tapeiro, ed., *Les Dix Paroles*, 1995, p. 307.

183. "Talmudic law defines the practical content of the obligations of respect and honour and the displacement of meaning to which it subjects the notion of honour must be emphasized. In fact, the *honour* shown to parents is understood by the Talmud as *service* and *obedience*, in which it is at some distance from the usual meaning. Georges Hansel, *Respect des parents, raison et identité*, 2005, site: <[http://
ghansel.free.fr/kibboud.html](http://ghansel.free.fr/kibboud.html)>.

184. *Ibid.*

185. *Ibid.*

186. Léon Askénazi, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 208.

187. *Ibid.*

188. "For I have embraced him so that he will charge his sons and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham all that He spoke concerning him." (Genesis 18:19)

189. Léon Askénazi, *op.cit.*, p. 197.

190. *Ibid.*, p. 220.